

# Reclaimers

by Doctor Life MD

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Summary: The Great War has ended and Humanity survived. Peace has set over the Orion Arm of the Galaxy. Battlegroup Foxtrot and its commanding officers - Captain John Sandman and Commander Chris C-333 - have been tasked with enforcing peace, but later on, their lives change when they are ordered to explore a completely different universe. M for violence and sexual content.

## 1. Unexpected Return

**\*\*Hello and welcome to mine (-Stealer-L1F3) and Toruscan's co-fic - Reclaimers. This co-fic is a crossover between Halo and Mass Effect and will pave the way for many new adventures for the crews of the UNSC Fire of Humanity (Owned by me) and the UNSC Cataclysm (Owned by Toruscan). Captain John Sandman, Rala 'Thenam, the AI Jessica and the crew of the UNSC Fire of Humanity belong to me. John B-201, Chris C-333, Edward Terrence, Krilus Kroctus, the AI Tanya and the crew of the UNSC Cataclysm belong to Toruscan. Anyways, dive in to the first chapter of the story!**

**>But before you dive in, I highly suggest you read Halo: Shock Troopers (Written by me) and Dawn of the Spartan (Written by Toruscan) to get a better grasp of what's going on and so on. Anyways, once ready, dive in!<br>\*\***

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**><p><strong>Continued from Chapter Fourteen of Halo: Shock Troopers.<strong>**

**\*\*Twenty hours after entering the slipspace portal, UNSC Fire of Humanity's bridge, 1435 hours by UTC, December 12th.**

**><strong>' 'Captain, we've got a slipspace malfunction and we're forced to exit it, otherwise we'd be stuck.' ' Jessica chimed in from a holo-tank that was the closest to John. John was sleeping on his chair, his head laid back on it and Rala was sleeping right on him.**

This was a rather awkward sight for the AI.

'Huh?' John slowly woke up and thanks to his augmentations he could get a grasp of the situation much faster than before. 'Ohâ€| goddammit, the hell just happened? I wanted to have â€|' John suddenly looked down to notice Rala in a cute position sleeping on him. 'Never mind. Did we leave slipspace already?'

'Yes, Captain. I am currently trying to understand what happened, butâ€| slipspace rupture detected!' Jessica was shocked to find a sudden slipspace rupture and she could detect a high tonnage vessel leaving slipspace right next to the UNSC Fire of Humanity. 'It's on a direct course towards us! Ten kilometers and counting down!' John slowly closed his eyes and wrapped his hands around Rala, in hopes to survive or save her in case they get rammed out of existence.

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><p><strong>Reclaimers, Chapter One.<br>\*>

>John was sitting on his chair with his hands wrapped around the sleeping Rala, his head placed on hers and his eyes closed, still awaiting impact until Jessica informed him that the unidentified ship passed by with an emergency evasive maneuver.<p>

'Captain, we're safe. The unidentified ship has evaded impact and it's apparently lining up its front with ours.'

John then slowly opened his eyes and unwrapped his hands, proceeding to pinch himself and making sure that he isn't dreaming. When he confirmed that he was not dreaming, he looked through the observation window to notice a massive ship and he could make out a symbol on its side â€" the UNSC's black eagle. The ship was massive, roughly five kilometers long and visibly sporting a lot of guns, but it was slightly resembling the UNSC Trafalgar, a UNSC Supercarrier. The name on the side of the ship confirmed John's suspicions that it was an unknown UNSC ship. The name of the ship was \_UNSC Cataclysm\_.

'UNSC Fire of Humanity, CFV dash one zero zero, please respond. If anyone aboard is alive, please acknowledge this message immediately.' A communications signal came from the UNSC Cataclysm. The voice in the transmission was rather feminine, but due to the communication arrays always making the voices more mechanical, he could not be one hundred percent sure if that was an AI or a human being. Still, John proceeded to reply by activating the communicator on the holo-table.

'This is the United Nations Space Command Phoenix-class Battlecruiser, \_Fire of Humanity\_. We read you loud and clear, unknown ship.' John answered, trying to maintain his usual stoic attitude while still being half-asleep.

'It's so great to hear another UNSC Naval Captain's voice. Could you please identify yourself?' This time a male voice was heard, but even through the communication array's mechanical voices, John could remember who had that voice. It was the SPARTAN-III Headhunter Chris C-333.

'My name's Captain John Sandman. It's good to hear your voice again, Chris. I assume John and Tanya are still with you?' Captain Sandman introduced himself and shocked the Commanding Officer of the UNSC

Cataclysm.

'John? Well I'll be damned! Is that really you?' John B-201 joined in the conversation and immediately after, Jessica informed of the availability of video communications.

'Captain, I can establish a live video feed between the bridges if you'd like.' Her offer intrigued the Captain and he agreed.

'Do it.' John said and shortly after, he could see a live video feed coming in from the UNSC Cataclysm's bridge. The video could be seen on the large monitor at the back of the UNSC Fire of Humanity's bridge. John moved his chair closer to it even while Rala was still sleeping right on him.

'Watch out! You've got an Elite on you and it could bite!' John B-201 attempted to warn the Captain, but then noticed he had one arm in the air as a sign to relax.

'Relax, bro. She's allied, just like the rest of the Sangheili race.' John calmed the SPARTAN Headhunter down a bit.

'Ohâ€¦' The Headhunter replied, unsure of what to say or do next.

'How have you been, brother?' Chris C-333 asked as they haven't met for a long time. 'How's Jessica?'

'Jessica's dead, Chris.' John informed the SPARTAN Headhunter who then gave his condolences.

'I feel sorry for you, John. Please, accept my condolences.' Chris said and John then felt Rala waking up.

'Who's her, though?' Chris was rather curious of seeing a Sangheili sleeping on the Captain's lap and with her hands wrapped around him.

'My new girlfriend.' John admitted while staring at the sleeping beauty waking up. When John admitted that the Sangheili was his girlfriend, Chris and John were both shocked with their mouths literally hanging down until they got themselves together.

'A Sangheili? Man, that doesn't seem right.' John B-201 joined back in and then Captain Sandman could see two strange aliens behind him, but he didn't want to bother anyone.

'Perhaps we can come aboard and talk face to face, eh John? Besides, I've got three people who want to meet you in person.' Chris suggested and John agreed and smiled to that.

'You can land at Hangar Bay Oh Three. I think it's the only one that has plenty of landing space for a Pelican dropship.' John informed Chris and turned off video comms.

'What's new?' Rala asked out of curiosity, barely awake, with a sleepy voice.

'Old friends will visit us, Rala. Please, wake up now. I don't want to leave you sitting on my chair and sleeping all day long.' John

said, staring into Rala who was trying her luck with a cute smile, but she failed and got up, still smiling. She didn't want to sleep all day long either.

'Let's go then.' She said and hooked her left hand around John's right one. The pair proceeded to head to the Hangar Bay 03 which was two decks below and a kilometer behind the bridge.

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><p><strong>UNSC Fire of Humanity, Hangar Bay 03, 1511 hours by UTC.<br>\*\*A UNSC-marked D77H-TCI Pelican dropship arrived in the hangar and barely fitted in between all the rubble from the Battle of Installation 00. Five people came out of the Pelican, two SPARTAN-III Headhunters, one human and two unidentified aliens. The ODSTs at the hangar bay immediately pointed their MA5C Assault Rifles towards the two aliens.

'Chill! They're friendly!' The unknown human went in front of the multiple barrels pointed at the aliens. The ODSTs were quite confused.

'Captain, please tell them to stand down.' Chris wanted the ODSTs to calm down and John approached one ODST, lowering his barrel. The other ODSTs followed and lowered the barrels of their MA5C Assault Rifles.

'Thank you.' The unknown alien female spoke while the other alien who was rather similar to an avian, came from behind the human and approached Captain John Sandman and Rala 'Thenam who was standing right beside him.

'John Sandman?' The avian-like alien spoke in clear English. John raised an eyebrow and tilted his head slightly to the side.

'There should be a Captain in there somewhere.' John said while staring at the alien in front of him with his eyebrow still raised. Rala silently chuckled at that comment.

'My name is Krilus Kroctus. I am a Citadel Council Spectre and I come from the Turian Hierarchy, our race is known as the Turians.' Krilus introduced himself to the human Captain standing in his black armor straight in front of him. He stretched his hand out for a hand-shake. John accepted it and shook the Turian's hand. 'I've heard so much about you that I want to hear stories from you personally!' The Turian seemed excited but John, nevertheless, was still suspicious. When the Turian stepped aside to let the others introduce themselves, the first one that came to him was a female in what seemed to be an environment suit.

She had an EVA-like helmet, three thick fingers on her hands, bent back knees and hips that were larger than normal. This suited alien approached the Captain and she had to raise her head pretty high to look into the human's face, because he is roughly thirty centimeters taller than she is.

'My name is Tali'Zorah nar Rayya. I'm a quarianâ€|' Tali noticed that Captain Sandman was observing her suit and the alien beside him did the same.

'May I see your face? It's a sign of respect when there's nothing to obstruct one's face during a meeting.' Captain Sandman asked while staring into the eyes of the young quarian in front of him.

'I am sorry, no. If I remove my helmet I might catch an infection. We quarians spend our lives in environmental suits, hiding from diseases and infections and remove our helmets only to the ones we love the most. It's a thing of intimacy to us for the past three centuries.' Tali'Zorah explained why she could not and would not remove her helmet to Captain Sandman, even if it would be considered respectful among humans.

'I see. Well, I am pretty sure you know my name.' John said and then Rala went closer to him, reminding John to introduce her to the rest as well. 'Oh, this is Rala 'Thenam. She is a Sangheili Spec Ops Officer. A very deadly one, if I might add. I witnessed her skills myself when she wiped out my best Marines and I wouldn't try to piss her off in any way.' John introduced the three with Rala and warned them of her skills as a real warrior.

'Waitâ€¦ shouldn't you be rivals? I mean, as much as I know humans, they mostly seek revenge for the death of their best men or friends.' Krilus questioned why the two were standing peacefully and so close to each other.

'Wellâ€¦' Rala wanted to explain that she and John are a pair, but John interrupted her and explained it himself.

'Yeah, the thing isâ€¦ I forgave her becauseâ€¦ how do I put this more delicately? We're in love with each other.' John explained, carefully choosing his words but he still didn't say it the way he planned.

'Uhâ€¦' Krilus seemingly stopped responding to anything once he heard that sentence, but he did see Rala as a rather beautiful alien.

'Ah love. It has no boundaries, it forges alliances and makes peace between enemies.' Edward said while the two aliens were still duffed.

'My name's Edward Terrence. I am an ex-N7 Marine Biotic. Nothing else to say.' Edward introduced himself, albeit it was the shortest of the introductions. Still, John offered a handshake to him and the two shook hands.

'John, you seem a bit taller since the last time we met. Are you still growing?' Chris joked about John's height, but then John revealed something that no one was expecting, except for Rala who was there when John was going through that hellish pain.

'Chris, I'm now a Spartan Four. I've been augmented with the same stuff that the other Spartans were augmented. I thought you might notice it by my armorâ€¦' John said and observed his own armor before observing Chris's and John B-201's armors.

'Well, I had my thoughts.' John B-201 commented after observing Captain Sandman's black MJOLNIR GEN2 Recruit armor.

'Wellâ€¦ is your ship slipspace capable? Our Shaw-Fujikawa drives

broke down and we're unable to enter slipspace anymore.'" John wanted to leave deep space and return to Earth as soon as possible.

'Yes, John, our ship has the capabilities to make a slip back to Earth. Your ship will have to closely follow our slipspace wake if you want to get back to Earth.'" Tanya, the UNSC Cataclysm's AI chimed in through Chris's communicator.

'Thank you, Tanya.'" John thanked and then looked towards John B-201 and Chris C-333.

'You five should probably return to your ship. You wouldn't want to get lost in space if our ship doesn't appear where it should be.'" John suggested a possibility that none would want to risk with. The five climbed back in their D77H-TCI Pelican and took a trip back to the UNSC Cataclysm. John then proceeded to contact Jessica, his ship's AI.

'Jessica, once the UNSC Cataclysm activates its slipspace drive, follow in their slipspace wake. It'll take us right to Earth.''

'Alright, Captain. It will be done.'" Jessica acknowledged the order, but before she could end the communications with Captain Sandman, he gave her a question.

'How's Commander Charles Lowell? Is he going to live?'" John asked a question to which Jessica wanted to answer a while later, but had to answer right now.

'Captain, Commander Lowell is stable for now, but I can't say for how long. It's for the best that we return to Earth as soon as possible and, like you know yourself, the Cataclysm is our best shot.'" Jessica answered, calming John's curiosity of his XO for a while.

'Thanks, Jess.'" John thanked and ended the comms. 'Let's get back up, Rala, shall we?'" He offered his hand to Rala and she hooked her hand around it, like previously.

After a while, the UNSC Cataclysm spun up its slipspace drive and entered slipspace, leaving the slipspace wake behind it which was used by the UNSC Fire of Humanity to follow in the Cataclysm's tracks all the way back to Earth.

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><p><strong>Well, that's the end of chapter one. Old friends meet again while new friends are made. I hope you enjoyed it. Remember to follow or favorite the story and leave reviews with ideas, thoughts and so on.<br>Also, I could not hold and had to add a famous line spoken by Captain Jack Sparrow. :D<br><strong>

## 2. News, Wars and Vacations

\*\*Hello, -Stealer-L1F3 and Toruscan here bringing you a new chapter for the story 'Reclaimers'. We hope you enjoy it reading as much as we enjoyed making it just for you, our dear readers! So, dive in!

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><p><strong>January 13th, 2553. Earth, Sol System.<br>**Earth was receiving its last waves of survivors from the Battle of Installation 00 and the Fire of Humanity was stamped already as 'Missing in Action, possibly lost with all hands.'** That is, until the ship left slipspace near Luna after a ship twice its size appeared. A small flotilla of UNSC frigates approached the five kilometer giant and the two and a half kilometer UNSC Phoenix-class Battlecruiser right beside it.

'Unidentified ship, please identify yourself.' One of the ship commanders opened a direct com-link to the UNSC Cataclysm, the ship that they were trying to identify.

'This is the UNSC Supercarrier Cataclysm. We've brought a ship back from deep space.' A feminine voice from the UNSC Cataclysm reported back to the UNSC flotilla.

'UNSC Supercarrier Cataclysm, we do not have any mention of you in the database.' The same ship commander was relentless to know what truly is that massive warship.

'Long story short, it was built in secret.' The mysterious female voice answered and then Lord Hood himself interfered.

'Commander, stand down and let them through.' Lord Hood ordered and the flotilla immediately complied, seeing as how they didn't want to argue against the de facto leader of the UNSC. The UNSC flotilla flew aside, clearing a path for the two ships to prowl to Earth.

'John, your ship will have to ride straight towards the shipyards.' Chris C-333 suggested a possibility that John had already taken as fact.

'I know.' John replied shortly as his ship, the Fire of Humanity, prowled to the nearest Earth shipyard.

Upon arrival in the shipyard, the crew had to leave the ship entirely, leaving it empty for the engineers to perform the repairs and refits of the ship. While en-route to the nearest hangar bay, John and Rala were discussing about their future in this new era of peace.

'Soâ€¦ what are you going to do now?' John asked while looking around through his armor's helmet.

'I don't know. Maybe I'll head back to Sanghelios to rejoin my familyâ€¦' Rala answered and sighed heavily. She didn't really know what to do. 'What about you, John?'

'Hmâ€¦ I don't really know. I've got a ship, a crew but no destination as of now. Well, maybe I'll be assigned to patrol outer edges of UNSC space, but that I doubt because the Admirals know it very well that I'll never agree being sent to some boring patrols.' John shrugged, not knowing what to do himself.

'Maybe you can come with me to Sanghelios? I'd introduce you to my family, show you the city in which I was born and the planet itself.' Rala proposed an interesting thought. Suddenly, the pair stopped because John was given a list of refits, changes and upgrades that will be introduced to the ship and its inventory.

'Hold that thought for a second, Rala.' John said and took the datapad from the Engineer that gave it to him.

John noticed that the ship will have three missile types, instead of just the Archer missiles and all will be serving their own purpose from anti-ship to anti-fighter and orbital support. The Fire of Humanity will be granted shields as well and some things that John never expected. The entire inventory of GA-TL1 Longswords is meant to be swapped out for the more compact, faster and more powerful F-41 Exoatmospheric Multirole Strike Fighters also known as 'Broadwords'. Only six GA-TL1 Longswords are suggested to be left. Six new hangar bays will be constructed in the lower levels of the ship each being four hundred and ninety meters long, one hundred and sixty meters wide and one hundred and forty meters high. They are meant to store the upgraded Charon-class Light Frigates in them. That was a new tactic recently developed by UNSC Scientists.

The ship had to be completely reconstructed to be larger in size, width and height. The planned length was four kilometers, height eight hundred meters and the width was planned to be roughly five hundred meters. The new size won't come without any additions, as more guns will be installed. More missile pods, more missile turrets. The heavy deck guns will be removed entirely and instead of them, the Mark 2488 Magnetic Accelerator Cannons will be placed on the sides of the ship to allow the vessel to be much more effective against alien ships in broadside showdowns.

Additionally, the 50mm point defense guns will be swapped out for the new and the more efficient 70mm point defense guns. A total of five hundred of these guns will be placed around the ship's hull. The missile pod count will be increased to seven hundred to accommodate all three missile types with the Archer missiles still remaining the most important of them all.

The Fire of Humanity's two fusion reactors will be enhanced and finally merged together into a twin fusion reactor. Also, the Shaw-Fujikawa Translight Engine will be swapped out for a new prototype, a much more accurate and faster slipspace drive that is slowly phasing out the old slipspace drive on all Human ships.

John gave the report back to the Engineer and looked awkwardly through his visor.

'Uhâ€¦ seems useful.' John commented and turned back to Rala, remembering that she gave him an offer to visit Sanghelios. 'Rala, please let me go with you to Sanghelios.' John kindly asked and Rala could not refuse.

'Sure.' She replied and then noticed that a Pelican is just waiting for her and John. A Marine popped out of it and shouted for the two.

'Captain Sandman, Miss 'Thenam. The both of you are requested by Lord Terrence Hood at Cairo Station. Please, get in so that we may



head there immediately.' The Marine went back inside while John and Rala came closer to the Pelican's troop bay's entry. John offered his hand to help Rala get in the Pelican first " a step of a true gentleman.

'Do humans always do this?' Rala asked while getting inside the Pelican with John's help. After that, John got in himself and the Pelican's troop bay's doors sealed tight as it took off from the beaten up Battlecruiser.

'Only those who were educated to be gentle to females.' John answered, smiling to Rala while their Pelican was heading for the Cairo Station.

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><p><strong>ODA-142 Cairo. January 13<strong>\*\*\*th\*\*\*\*, 2553, 1344 hours by UTC.\*\*

>The Pelican arrived at a hangar in Cairo Station and unloaded its two passengers with its engines slowly shutting down.<p>

'Where must we go now?' Rala asked, because she was unfamiliar with the layout of the station and therefore she would get lost in the next corner.

'Follow me.' John said, convinced that he knows where to go.

With the two of them roaming around the Cairo Super MAC station, it took a long while for them to reach the bridge of the station where Lord Hood was waiting along with SPARTAN-III Headhunters John B-201 and Chris C-333.

'Welcome, you two. Captain, please stand in line with the Headhunters. Miss 'Thenam, please take a seat right there.' Lord Hood ordered the Captain to stand in line with the Spartans while directing Rala to a seat not too far away.

'John Two Oh One and Chris Three Three Three, I hereby promote you both to the rank of Lieutenant. You two have served the UNSC faithfully before disappearing into the unknown black of slipspace.' Lord Hood announced and approached the two SPARTAN-IIIs that were clad in their MJOLNIR Mark X Forerunner-developed Powered Assault Armor. Chris looked at Lord Hood through his Mark VI helmet, though he did not say anything, but just kept looking.

'Also, for your actions during the war I award you both with the Colonial Cross " a reward given to those who show singular daring and devotion that both of you have shown during the war.' Lord Hood proceeded to hand the Colonial Crosses to the Headhunters. The ribbons of the Crosses had blue stripes running vertically on its sides with two tiny red stripes surrounding a central yellow one. The Spartans secured their Colonial Crosses in their hands while Lord Hood prepared to award Captain Sandman.

'Captain John Sandman, for your repeated acts of valor on the battlefield, I award you with the Gold Star' Lord Hood handed a gold star medal whose ribbon had a yellow stripe in the middle with a vertical orientation, surrounded by two blue stripes. 'Also, for being injured while fighting the Covenant on the opening stages of the Battle of Earth, you are awarded with the Purple Heart.' Lord

Hood handed the Purple Heart medal to Captain John Sandman. The Purple Heart had a ribbon entirely in purple color, but the medal itself has the George Washington engravement in the middle of the heart.

'All three of you get awarded with the Great War Medal for living through the entire war that cost humanity twenty three billion dead and almost all of our colonies.' Lord Hood and his fellow officers awarded the Spartan Headhunters and the Spartan-IV Captain with the Great War Medal. The Great War Medal's ribbon was entirely black with twenty three stars on it. Each star representing one billion dead humans. The medal itself had the UNSC symbol on it, but the UNSC's eagle was sitting on Earth, instead of an alien world, as seen by Earth's main continents on it. That was symbolizing Earth as humanity's last bastion and greatest victory that secured human survival.

'Speaking on behalf of the entire United Nations Space Command and all of its branches, I thank you for your service and loyalty during the war in which all of us had to stick together and I hope your loyalty will not falter, but only strengthen while serving humanity with great honor and pride.' Lord Hood spoke and raised his right hand up in a salute, honoring the three men in front of him. All of the bridge's officers saluted in honor of the trio. The three Spartans raised their hands in a salute as well.

'You may be dismissed, Spartans, but Spartans John Two Oh One and Chris Three Three Three must remain for a debriefing of their new mission.' Captain John and Rala left the bridge, leaving the two other Spartans with Lord Hood and the rest of the officers.

'The Sangheili have asked for UNSC's minimal help in dealing with a threat on one of their moons orbiting Sanghelios – the homeworld of their race. Apparently, the Brutes have occupied it, slaughtered many civilians and are holding the entire planet occupied. The intervention of the Headhunters may save their moon from total destruction.' Lord Hood gave the two a short info about a request from Sanghelios.

'Spartans, this is very important. As their friends, we have to help them out in beating back the Brutes.' Lord Hood handed the two datapads containing the objectives. Sabotage and assassination.

'We'll head out for Sanghelios immediately, Sir.' The two Spartans saluted and turned around to leave, but Lord Hood prevented them from leaving yet.

'Keep your ship out of the Brute radar range, otherwise they might attack us while we're still weak. Insert via Pelican and once all objectives are done, extract through a Pelican as well. Now go, make Humanity proud!'

'Sir, yes, Sir!' The Spartans acknowledged their optional objectives and left the bridge, heading for the hangar bay in which their Pelican was parked in.

Meanwhile, while John B-201 and Chris C-333 were heading for Sanghelios to assist the Sangheili, John and Rala were taking a four day long vacation on Florida, United Republic of North America,

before taking an upgraded UNSC Charon-class Light Frigate and heading to Sanghelios.

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><p><strong>January 14<strong>\*\*\*th\*\*\*\*, 2553, 0956 hours by UTC. Sanghelios' orbit.

><strong>The Headhunters prepared for their mission to travel behind the enemy lines, it was the first mission for the Headhunters in a long time but the SPARTANS thought they were up for the task and with the aid of the MJOLNIR Mark X; everything would go smoother than usual. While they were inside their SOEIV's Chris decided to talk to B-201 via his helmet. John was the first to speak to Chris.

"Hey wouldn't we have an easier time going through the mission with Tanya tagging along, Chris?" Chris simply sighed at his friend; he had apparently forgotten the pact they had made a long time ago.

"No Tanya ever on a Headhunter mission." Chris quoted his Headhunter friend who thought Tanya ruined all the fun on their missions back then, but Chris agreed to it to make him find peace.

"Ohâ€| right." Chris just laughed at John and simply said.

"Damn John, I'm starting to suspect you have Alzheimer's or some shit like that." John gasped and raised his hands inside his pod and said with a "hurt feelings" tone to top it all off.

"How dare you ever say something like that to me Chris? I feel like you have stabbed me in the heart! "

"Quit exaggerating you little bitch." Both the SPARTANS laughed and prepared for the drop of the pods that would begin soon, Chris and John repeated a phrase before every one of their missions.

"Headhunters now until Forever!" Both the Spartans shouted aloud and with that, they were dropped into their destination, one of Sanghelios's two moons - Suban. The more industrial moon of the two.

The pods were starting to grab the heat of the fall, but Chris caught a glimpse of exploding plasma from afar, it was the Sangheili fighting the Brutes. The Headhunters mission was critical to victory so it all depended on the two of them. The pods were going faster and faster every second, Chris knew that they were going to hit land soon enough.

The pods entered the atmosphere and were burning. It was a matter of seconds until impact. A group of Grunts were sitting and guarding an area far from the Spartans landing area, and apparently, they did not notice anything.

Chris jumped out of his drop pod and noticed the small crater the pod caused with him inside it; the crater would be noticeably larger if he just dropped out without it. He scanned the area for John's pod and to his surprise, he found him already out and beside him.

"You know Chris, I'm starting grow fond of this armor, got out of the pod in an instant." John-B201 liked his improved reaction times that

the armor has gifted him.

"Right, we have got to move now if we want to do these things in time. There is a location 3 klicks away from here, there we can go over the plan and keep on moving from there, got it?"

"Loud and clear, Asswipe!" Moreover, with that the Headhunters kept everything going according to plan, they have never failed before and they do not plan to fail now.

The Spartans got to their first of many destinations, a high point that oversaw most of the surface. They could go over their tasks and plans there and so they began doing, while in the meantime they sat down and double checked their Forerunner weapons. As they were doing that they had a bit of normal conversations.

"Elites were a bitch; at least they're smart and that made them predictable, but Brutes thoughâ€¦" John cut off Chris.

"Look at them sideways and they lose their heads, makes them fun, it's like picking on an emotionally stunted twelve year old." Chris just shook his head and said.

"You were the bully as a kid weren't you?" Chris made a highly educated guess on what John was.

"Me? No, I was the twelve year old"

"Think that it teaches you sympathy forâ€¦" John cut off Chris once again.

"Sympathy? Yeah if getting your ass bruised teaches you anything, it's better to be the bully than the one getting beaten." John explained carefully.

"You are one enlightened individual, you know that?" Chris asked.

"I tend to think I turned out okay." John did not want to exaggerate either.

"John, you are essentially a government sanctioned sociopath, that's not normal andâ€¦ and somewhat say far from okay." John just looked down at his weapon and said.

"Like you're some kind of saintâ€¦" Chris also looked down at his gun.

"I never said I was I'm not saying that you are not a hell of a guy John, but I'm just saying I wouldn't trust you with my kids." Johns head quickly turns and he is silent for a second.

"You don't have kidsâ€¦" John returned to being silent for a little while.

"Then we've got nothing to worry about." John was eager to hear the plan now at this moment.

"Right, now here's the deal, our target is to take out the Brutes plasma and spike supplies if we succeed in that task their weapons won't last for very long." John thought it sounded easy enough but

where were they taking it he wondered.

"Where is it located, Chris?" John asked curiously.

"Here's the surprising part, it's all in the same place, just from point A to point B. The Brutes aren't very bright, if the Elites were in charge I can guarantee the mission would be a tad bit harder, but the Brutes are the Brutes so we still have to be careful about this John." John nodded and asked another question to Chris.

"The location of this place?" Chris sent a Map with the location marked to John's helmet interface so he could see it.

"There is where they keep it, Sangheili ruins. By the looks of it they just looked for the closest area to throw it in, our part is that we will plant explosives there and disrupt the supply line there giving the Sangheili an easier time against the Brutes." John was a bit suspicious if that was really all they had to do.

"That's all?" John asked, Chris let out a small laugh and explained the next part to John.

"Not by a longshot, our next step after that is to assassinate a high profile target - a Brute Chieftain, with the explosives creating a big blue firework will get their attention and gives me enough time to take the shot and make the bullet pierce through his head and disintegrate him effectively." John liked the plan but he wondered one thing.

"You're taking the shot?" Chris looked towards John a bit and asked.

"You want too?" Chris wondered, John sure did not want to.

"You take it." John agreed to let Chris taking the shot; after all, he did not have a problem with it.

"Good, we have five hours before the Pelican comes and picks us up John; we will do this thing in three alright?"

"Right, let's move out. The supplies are our first target; it is three clicks north of our location so get moving." The Headhunters moved out to get this operation done.

Chris and John were crouching in active camo so nothing can spot them. Chris was scanning the ruins and he saw the plasma and spike supplies behind a gate guarded by two Brutes and the entire ruins was swarmed with grunts, Chris had an idea in mind, but John was required.

"Hey John, see those Brutes guarding the gate?" John crouched beside Chris and scanned the area as well.

"Yeah, and it's swarmed with Grunts." Chris turned his head to John and smiled behind his visor.

"Want to play a game?" John did not like the sound of it but it was vital to the mission so he had to agree to it.

"Why not, what's my role?" John said in a bitter tone.

"I need those Grunts to create a distraction, so those two Brutes get away from the gate and I can plant the explosives." John simply nodded and they proceeded.

The Headhunters snuck into the ruins with their active camo as they did not want to cause a commotion. Chris was behind a pile of pillars waiting for John's distraction, while in the meanwhile he saw a large group of Grunts walking past the Brutes and he knew that was John's key.

John stood on a rooftop in active camo looking for a good opportunity to purchase Chris his distraction. He suddenly saw a large group of Grunts and said.

"Chris got his Christmas present early this year." Then a plasma grenade appeared in his hand and he threw it in the middle of the group, it was only a matter of second before they completely exploded and flew in random directions away from the explosion site.

Chris saw the Brutes running towards the explosion John must have caused and he knew this was his chance. He dashed through the gate, inside was a large supplies of plasma, spikes and helium fuel among other things. Chris smiled and began planting the explosives.

"Hey John, let's get out of here ASAP before they notice anything vital." John heard Chris and began to sprint out as well as Chris did.

The Headhunters has succeeded in their first task and now the Chieftain was the only one remaining. John asked Chris about their next step.

"Did you manage to plant them Chris?" John curiously asked as always, Chris smiled behind his visor.

"I did indeed, here's the detonator and remember: When in doubt blow shit up." He threw the detonator to John and he catches it.

"Right the highpoint facing the Chieftains location is no more than 2 clicks away from here so we better get moving again." John nodded and started sprinting beside Chris.

The Headhunters had arrived to the high point and set up the Z-750 Special Application Sniper Rifle. Chris could see the Brutes assemble but no sign of the Chieftain yet. He proceeded to go over this with John.

"Hey John, on my signal I want you to blow shit up. We must do it in time or this will get harder." John simply nodded and waited until Chris gave out the signal.

Chris was aiming with the Binary Rifle to the assembly point when suddenly, he saw the Chieftain appear and he began to count down with his fingers in front of John. John started to feel the ground shake a bit, he looked down and a second later he saw a Brute charging at full speed right in front of him. He was going for Chris, John within an instant was in front of the Brute wrestling him down to the ground, he managed to smack the detonator out of his hands it slide down to a corner. John activated his Hardlight Blade and stabbed the

Brute in its head making him disintegrate. He panicked as he saw Chris just finishing his countdown and threw himself to the detonator.

"John the fuck are you upâ€¦!" A big boom interrupted Chris he had detonated the explosives. The Chieftain was about to leave until he turned his head and saw the explosion, Chris instantly aimed with precision and pulled the trigger. The projectile went straight through his brain; the Chieftain fell to the ground and disintegrated.

He saw John lying on the ground and barely pressed the detonator in time, he also saw the ashes of a brute. John explained to Chris what happened.

"A brute came charging at you, so I killed it." Chris smiled again behind his visor and said.

"The fucks I was about to give, now let's get out of here to the rendezvous point for extraction." John simply laughed and the Headhunters could hear the Brutes roar at the death of their Chieftain.

\* \* \*

><p>A few hours later a D77H-TCI Pelican came to the extraction point and picked up the Headhunters inside it. John took off his helmet revealing his rather scarred face, but Chris did stick to his.<p>

"Hell of a ride, don't you think Chris?" John asked his fellow Headhunter.

"One of many to come my beloved sociopath." Chris was relieved they were back on the track now.

The Pelican disappeared into space now with the successful Headhunters. They made a critical change for the Sangheili, breaking the stalemate.

The Sangheili sent a CCS-class Battlecruiser to land and deploy troops to secure the moon once and for all.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>January 16<strong>\*\*\*th\*\*\*\*, 2553, 1101 hours by UTC. Sanghelios's Low Orbit. UNSC Frigate ''Spear of Mars''.

><strong>'Well, Rala. We're over Sanghelios.' John said while staring through a window in one of the lower decks of the frigate.

'The homeworld is beautiful, isn't it?' Rala asked as for her, the slightly arid-looking planet was beautiful. Sanghelios had a larger desert than Earth because it had three stars in its system, but it still retained that green and blue look of Terran-type worlds that was made by the large grasslands and vast oceans.

'Looks to be extremely hot on it.' John said after noticing the massive desert in the middle of the planet that was three times

larger than the Sahara on Earth.

'The continent of Yermo isn't that hot. Well, just its Southern part is, because that's where a desert is and the borders of the State of Vadam end there. The Northern part where the City of Vadam is located it is rather cool. About as cool as your European continent's Southern part.' Rala explained the temperatures, even though the average temperatures on Sanghelios can go up as high as fifty six degrees per Celsius, but no lower than minus five degrees per Celsius.

'Waitâ€¦ as much as I had learned about Sangheili named, you should be named Vadam because you were born in the State of Vadam, should you not?' John began raising questions, but Rala quickly satisfied his curiosity.

'Yes, I should be, but sometimes Sangheili make exceptions in honor of others. We are an honorable race, remember?' Rala smiled and began heading to the nearest hangar bay that would contain a Pelican dropship.

'Ohâ€¦' John replied shortly and his curiosity died down for now.

'Come. I can't pilot your vehicles, so you'll have to take me down to my home.' Rala was eager to return to her family after two years of serving in the Covenant Navy. She and John both occupied the cockpit but John assumed full control of the Pelican and began piloting it out of the UNSC Spear of Mars and down to the surface of Sanghelios, to the continent of Yermo that reminded just a bit of Europe by its shape, only it didn't have any inland seas like the Baltic Sea or the Black Sea.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Earth High Orbit, January 16<strong>\*\*\*th\*\*\*\*, 2553, 1135 hours by UTC.\*\*

>The UNSC Cataclysm arrived from slipspace directly over Earth, near the shipyard where the UNSC Fire of Humanity was getting refitted and improved.<p>

Inside the ship, the team of five â€" John B-201, Chris C-333, Krilus, Edward and Tali were playing a Human game of 'Spin the bottle'. Edward had spun the bottle and the bottle's tip upon stopping pointed towards Tali. Edward was preparing a question for her as they were playing the Truth or Dare type of that same game.

'Tali, truth or dare?' Edward asked, waiting for Tali's answer.

'Umâ€¦ truth!' Tali said, believing that it won't be anything stupid.

'Alright, Tali. Do you like any of the men here?' Edward gave his question and then Tali's eyesight turned towards Chris C-333.

'Umâ€¦ yesâ€¦' Tali answered shyly and Edward, along with Krilus, wanted to know who it was.



'And who is it?' Edward asked but then John B-201 intervened.

'Edward, you can ask only one question per turn!' John B-201 defended Tali's secret even though he knew it wasn't him that she liked, but it was Chris C-333.

'Fine.' Edward and Krilus both gave up and the team continued their friendly game.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>So, I hope you all enjoyed reading this chapter and don't forget to leave reviews with your thoughts and ideas. Also, I do realize that a small bit of dialogue has been taken Halo: Evolutions - Essential Tales of the Halo Universe, Headhunters, but me and Toruscan agreed that it was for the best, so we hope that you don't become too strict about that. Anyways, the next chapter will come soon.<br>\*\*

### 3. New Beginnings

\*\*Hello everyone! Wow, it's been one year already since I (-Stealer-L1F3) began writing on Fanfiction and it had its ups and downs. I have enjoyed writing the Fanfics that I have written and I thank all of you for your continued support that you have shown to me. I really appreciate it guys and girls, I really do. I thank each and every one of you for this.  
>Anyways, me and Toruscan are bringing you a new chapter in the story. Dive in.<br>\*\*

\* \* \*

><p><strong>January 16th, 1731 hours by UTC. Sanghelios, Yermo, State of Vadam.<br>\*\*\*'I have never seen so many Sangheili in my life. Never!' John whined when he saw hundreds of Sangheili surround him and Rala in the middle of a street, giving him angry looks as if he was not welcome. Many, on the other hand, had friendly looks, like if they were embracing the arrival of a Human on their world.

'Don't worry. My family's home is just a few dozen meters from here.' Rala was most excited to return back home and even began running with John following behind her closely. After a short sprint, they arrived at Rala's parent's home. It had completely alien architecture, but also reminded a bit of Human Renaissance-era architecture. It had a relatively large backyard. Possibly, Rala's parents were Nobles among the Sangheili. Rala's mother, who seemed to be a bit shorter than Rala, opened the door for the two.

'Rala! You're back!' Rala's mother was rather happy to see her daughter, but she did not proceed to give her a hug. John thought that maybe it was not part of Sangheili traditions. 'Please, come in. Your father was expecting to see you.' Rala's mother invited her in. Rala stretched out her hand to John to grab him by his shoulder and drag him in as well, because he was looking at the Sangheili walking on the streets. After grabbing John, she went inside and pulled him along. Rala's mother was wondering what was going on.

Rala released John upon entering the house and went to the other side of it to leave the house and enter the backyard where her father was honing his skills with a sword on a mannequin.

'Father!' Rala was happy to see her father again and she kneeled before him showing honor. Her father was roughly half a meter taller than her and was wearing Zealot armor with red colors.

Her father, a Sangheili Aristocrat " Swordsmaster, turned around from his mannequin and looked at Rala.

'Rala! Welcome back to your home!' He was happy to see her as well, but then he noticed a Human in black, bulky armor standing right next to the door leading in the house from the backyard. The father immediately ran on to him, trying to beat him down, but the superior strength and reflexes of the Human took him completely by surprise.

'A Demon.' Rala's father determined that it was one of the Human super-soldiers that the Covenant nickname 'Demons'. John slowly released the father's hand, who slowly pulled it away from the Human. John was completely taken by surprise of the next thing that Rala's father did. Rala's father pulled out a second sword from behind him and handed it to John. He wanted to test the Captain's abilities.

'It's in our tradition to test one's skill.' The father said and readied his own sword. John took his battle-ready stance with sword " his left shoulder facing Rala's father and his sword being held firmly in his right hand and pointed away, down to the ground in an angle.

John raised his left arm and stretched it half-way out and moved two fingers out of a clenched fist. He moved those fingers in the fist and out, and back in again " a taunt. He was ready for an attack and with the taunt he wanted Rala's father to begin the attack. By the time he finished his taunt, he had calculated all of the Sangheili swordsman's attacks and how to deflect them safely.

The Sangheili Swordsmaster attacked and attempted to make an overhead stab on the Spartan. John swiftly blocked the attack by raising his sword in the air to meet the Sangheili's sword in a loud clack. In a split second, John raised his armored foot and kicked the swordsman away. He began his own attack with a predator move forward and slashing his sword sideways. The swordsman swiftly recovered and blocked the sideways attack, but John quickly pulled the sword back and began a direct stab to the chest. The sword was thrown aside by the Swordsmaster's own sword, but another attack followed almost immediately.

This time, John used the force which was used to throw the sword away against the Swordsmaster. He made a fast spin and decelerated to a full stop until his sword was just a centimeter away from the Swordsmaster's skin.

'TouchÃ©.' John said, mentioning that as the Swordsmaster's defeat.

'I am getting old.' The Swordsmaster blamed his age for the

inability to defend against such a predictable attack. ''But you were good for a Human. I was serving the Covenant for five years and had encountered many humans in close combat. None survived a duel with me. You're different, just like your Spartan kin.'' The Swordsmaster slowly got back up on his feet while commenting on the Spartan's skill with a sword.

''Thatâ€¦ or that you weren't trying hard enough. You Sangheili can do better than that, even at your elderly years.'' John was convinced that the Swordsmaster could've dealt more dangerous blows and do better parries than he did.

''Still, you defeated me. I wasn't expecting such skillful moves and I had forgotten the tales of Demons.'' The Swordsmaster made an excuse, a believable one. ''And a defeat is a defeat, no matter how hard you try to excuse your own self.''

John was amazed at the wisdom the Swordsmaster showed.

''Rala! You have met a great friend. All the others I have always defeated.'' Rala's father mentioned something about Rala always bringing home friends.

''Father!'' She whined and went back inside the house while her father turned to the Human.

''What's your name and rank, Human? What glory have you achieved in battle?'' Rala's father was getting ready to know his daughter's friend more closely.

''Captain John Sandmanâ€¦'' John noticed that the Aristocratic father was trying to remember what a Captain was. ''A Captain is a Shipmaster by Sangheili ranking systems.'' John helped him remember and then proceeded to show his medals after the Sangheili Aristocrat responded.

''Oh yes.'' The Aristocrat snapped out of his pondering moment and went inside the house, following Rala and her mother into a large room with a table in the middle and seats around it. The seats didn't have four legs, like human ones, but had only one in the middle that had supporting feet spread out to all sides. They seemed to be better suited for the legs of the Sangheili. The table, on the other hand, was much like Human tables with four legs.

Upon sitting down next to the table, John pulled out two Purple Heart medals and one Gold Star.

''The Purple Hearts were awarded to me for being injured while fighting the enemy of the UNSC on the battlefield. The Gold Star was awarded to me for my repeated acts of valor on the field. Also, there's this.'' John pulled out a Great War Medal that symbolized him surviving the war. ''This was awarded for surviving this war. This brutality. I've seen the brutality of this war firsthand and never will I forget it.

''You must have many war stories as you seem to be made for war. I could sense it while dueling with you. Your visor doesn't block your emotions like pain and your awards confirm it.'' Rala's father informed Captain Sandman that he could feel some of his emotions.

'I've been serving for six years already and in all those six years I've been doing nothing but fighting your kind to protect mine from extermination.' John explained while looking into Rala's father's eyes. He took off his helmet, revealing his face to the Sangheili around him. 'Only one occasion turned out to be fighting against my own kind. On that day, a person that I once held close to me was killed by a nuclear bomb.' John remembered the loss of Jessica, yet again, but still kept his emotions locked down. This time, his emotions didn't even try to break free as all grief for Jessica had gone away.

'We all make or take sacrifices in a war.' The father said upon sitting down at the end of the table where only one seat was present.

'Yeah&| and I learned that the hard way.' John said and placed his helmet on the table, but then noticed that Rala's mother was putting down dishes.

'Uh&|?' John felt confused, thinking that she's about to serve food that only Sangheili can eat.

'Don't worry. My little daughter informed me that she had a Human friend coming our way, so I prepared accordingly. Oh, and do you mind taking off that armor? It's already rather hot today.' Rala's mother kindly asked John to remove his armor, but John could not. Not without a special machine.

'Sorry, Ma'am, but I can't do that. Our Powered Assault Armor is removed only with the help of a special machine and a few technicians. Though I can remove it if I had the necessary tools to unlock the hardpoints. There were some tools in our Pelican, but I forgot to take them with me.' John explained the uneasy removal of the MJOLNIR armor and how he forgot to take the tools with him.

'Oh well, no harm done.' Rala's mother said, but then Rala herself came in with the tool necessary to unlock hardpoints of the suit.

'Stand up, big guy.' Rala said and John complied immediately. He stretched his arms out and Rala began using the tool like the technicians did it. She unlocked the hardpoints in two minutes so that John could easily remove his armor. After she unlocked it all, John removed his gauntlets, boots and other pieces of his armor, leaving just the thick, black bodysuit on.

'Well, I hope you aren't disappointed by how I've cooked this.' Rala's mother said and brought John a big portion of meat with something equivalent to potatoes. They looked like friend potatoes, but it was definitely the Sanghelios equivalent of them, because they looked a lot darker and their smell was different. The meat was definitely from an animal of Sanghelios, but John didn't even want to know what kind of animal.

'I hope I don't get poisoned, but hey, I feel hungry.' John thought to himself.

'Damn, if only our ship's cook was half as good as you, Ma'am.' John commented on Rala's mother's cooking skills after feeling the

tasty smell of the food and the great look of it.

'Go ahead, try it.' Rala's mother offered John to try it out first, so John took a fork that was apparently an instrument that Sangheili used as well, but it was slightly larger than a Human one. He took a piece of the Sanghelios 'potato' and put it in his mouth, beginning to chew it. When he finished chewing and swallowed it down, Rala's mother was getting nervous. John could tell that she tried hard and she succeeded. It tasted good, even for food grown on a world inhabited by an alien race.

'It's great, Ma'am, you shouldn't worry.' John calmed the mother down and supported his own initial thought that she cooks exceptionally well.

'Thank you!' Rala's mother thanked him for acknowledging her skill and sat down to eat her every day food.

'Tell us, how are Humans trained for battle?' Rala's father asked about John's boot camp days.

'For those who are not ready to face the psychological and physical hell, it's a nightmare. Actually, it's a nightmare for everyone. I've been trained two times. Once, I attended a Marine Corps boot camp on the fortress world of Reach and then I attended Marine Special Operations Academy on Mars where I received my Orbital Drop Shock Trooper specialty.' John began compiling all the adventures together.

'Trust me when I say this: a boot camp is nothing compared to what we needed to endure in ODS training. It was a true nightmare. We had almost no sleep, minimal rations, peak human energy output. Physical training runs almost every day. Sunday, the last day of a week, was relieved for us when we could get proper sleep. There were also strict teamwork rules. If one person messed up, the entire team got punished for it.' John then remembered some people who actually wanted to go back to the Marine Corps because of the impossible endurance required in ODS training. He was about to tell of incidents like those until Rala's father interrupted him for a bit to ask that same question that he was about to answer to.

'Did anyone leave because of this?' He asked, looking confident that the answer would be 'yes'.

'Yes, some left. Some argued with our Drill Instructors that the training is unbearable.' John replied and took a sip of water from a glass that was passed to him by Rala, who was sitting right next to him and carefully listening to the story as well.

'What about the arguments with these 'Drill Instructors'? How did they end? Was there a duel to prove one's point?' Rala's father thought that Humans sometimes resolve everything with a duel, but John dismissed that.

'No. We Humans don't resolve arguments with violence. We have the Courts to resolve many arguments, but in the military, the Drill Instructors often countered the endurance argument with the fact that they had to pass it themselves to become what they are.' John explained and then turned back to the meal.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>UNSC Cataclysm, Bridge. January 16<strong>\*\*\*th\*\*\*\*, 1823 hours by UTC. Neptune's orbit.

><strong>Chris was pondering about what to do with the part of the crew aboard his ship that isn't from this universe. He knew that ONI would want to run experiments on them and some other crazy things and that's what he wanted to save them from, so he called the three "Krilus, Edward and Tali" up to the bridge.

After a while, the three arrived at the bridge with John B-201.

'What's the rush, Chris?' Edward was most curious for the reason Chris called them up to the bridge.

'Listen, I am getting you all three back to your universe.' Chris said as he leaned slightly forward while sitting on his chair in the middle of the massive bridge, next to a holo-table.

'What? Why?' Krilus was the first to ask, because he has not seen the wonders of this universe to its fullest potentials.

'To protect you from our universe. It's filled with dangers even we do not fully understand.' John B-201 responded while walking up to Chris's side.

'But-' Tali wanted to say something but then Chris stared into her eyes.

'No, Tali, none of you can stay. John has requisitioned a Prowler that will take you to your universe with the aid of a copy of Tanya. She will land you in the nearest populated world and then go to a desolate world where no one can find it. When the copy's life span ends, the Prowler will be self-destructed.' Chris explained and with a press of a button on his chair, he opened a door in the bridge that was the quickest way to the Prowler.

'Pleaseâ€| don't make us throw you in.' Chris didn't want to wait too long and the trio complied as they made their way across the ship and found the Prowler that Chris mentioned.

'What should I do while you do whatever you have planned?' John was feeling ready to do anything.

'Maybe go visit Captain Sandman atâ€| wherever he is right now.' Chris said as he made up his mind. He felt that the ship was too ghostly without a crew and decided to head to Earth and ask for Lord Hood to give him a crew.

'Sanghelios. Yeah, on it.' John acknowledged. He kept standing next to Chris as he knew that he'd take him to Earth.

After a while and after confirming that the Prowler on which Tali, Edward and Krilus were on departed this universe via anomalous slipstream space, the UNSC Cataclysm made a slip to Earth, where John B-201 was given a Prowler under his command that he can use to safely reach Sanghelios.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Sanghelios, Rala's parents' home.<br>**Captain John Sandman was sleeping in a bed with his Sangheili girlfriend on the second floor of Rala's parents' home. He was having a dream about the Flood. A dream in which he is fighting the Flood alone, without augmentations and in his old ODST battle uniform.**

><strong>

><strong>John's dream, Unknown date and time, Unknown location.<br>**John was standing alone surrounded by Flood Infection Forms and Flood Combat Forms from all sides. He was armed with two M90 shotguns, one in each hand. And as spare weapons, he had two M6C Magnums and a single MA5C Assault Rifle.**

The Flood were moving surprisingly slow, giving John just enough time to finish them off.

'Take that, Galactic shitstains!' John taunted the Flood to attack again as he kept finishing them off with his shotguns, but the more of the Flood he killed, the more and faster they became until they began to get as close as his feet. Quickly, John threw his shotguns away and armed his MA5C and an M6C, but that provided pointless as Flood Infection Forms jumped on his chest and began tearing the armor off. He screamed in his dream out of agony as the Flood were tearing into his chest, tearing off his flesh, breaking ribs, the heart, the lungs and his blood vessels. He could see his own blood staining the concrete floor around him.

Suddenly, a Flood Infection Form jumped on his face and began tearing its way through his visor, quickly breaking it and tearing his head apart. The dream ended when John woke up loudly.

**Reality, Sanghelios, Yermo, State of Vadam, January 17\*\*\*\*th\*\*\*\*, 2553, 0453 hours by UTC.**

><strong>'GAAAAAH!' John shouted and quickly got up from the bed, checking if he was alright. He, unknowingly, woke Rala up while screaming and checking if his chest and head are still in place. Even though his experience with the Flood was minimal, it was a small skirmish, he still caught enough of the sight of them to be afraid of their animalistic brutality.

'John! What's wrong?!' Rala quickly turned to John's side, putting her hands across his sides and her head over his shoulder, noticing that he was checking if certain body parts were still in place. 'You had a nightmare about the Flood, didn't you?'

'Yeah&#128|' John confirmed her suspicions and dismissed his own worries. He was alright.

'They attacked me, not you, so&#128| why are you the one most afraid of them?' Rala asked in a sleepy tone, trying to comfort John.

'Natural Human instincts. Be afraid of something that might do the same to you.' John said and laid back down the bed with Rala lying right next to him with her hand passing right over his chest and her head placed on his shoulder.

'Is there any way I can make you feel better? To help you forget the parasite?' Rala was ready to do anything just so that her boyfriend would calm down.

'Iâ€¦ I don't knowâ€¦' John said silently and then the silence ensued for a few minutes. Rala was pondering on the situation, about what would help John.

He noticed that she closed her eyes and fell asleep and so did he. Soon after, he saw another nightmare. This time, Rala was attacked by the Flood in John's nightmare, while John was helpless to do anything as two Flood Combat Forms were holding him firmly in their hands.

John woke up again, this time silently, a half an hour later and decided that he needed some fresh air. He put on his undersuit, his combat boots, grabbed an M6C which he attached to his right hip and a combat knife with a holster that he attached to his left one and proceeded to head downwards and out of the house directly into the streets.

John didn't knew what he really wanted at that moment, but after taking a look around, he noticed that there was the coastline not too far away from the city itself. He wanted to head that way, but then he saw Spirit and Phantom dropships approach it and drop off Brute footsoldiers.

'Great. The gorillas have arrived to slaughter the Sangheili.' John said while realizing that he alone cannot deal with that many Brutes. He ran back inside the house and barricaded the doors with a table and some chairs.

He heard that someone was coming down, but that didn't bother him. It was Rala who came down, naked, to find John and she did find him, but he seemed to be prepared for a fight.

'John, what-' Rala wanted to ask what John was doing but John shushed her and whispered for her to get over to his side and look outside the small view lens of the door. She saw Brutes carefully stalking across the streets and she realized that she had to arm John up with his Powered Assault Armor.

'Follow me.' Rala said and led John to the 'living room' of the house where John's armor was lying around. She picked up the tool necessary to lock the armor in place while John removed his weapons and put on the thick and black bodysuit. When John put his bodysuit on, he began putting his armor around him and Rala was sealing it piece by piece. The process was rather long, because Rala was no expert. A UNSC technician could seal it in less than four minutes, but it took longer for Rala to do it, but John wasn't forcing her to hurry.

'Alright, there.' Rala reported as the armor suit was fully sealed. John put on the his black helmet with its golden visor. Inside, every part of his Heads-Up Display flickered to life from the motion sensor to the compass. He attached the combat knife to his shoulder and picked up his M6C. He ejected a clip to check if there are bullets in it and after seeing that it's fully loaded, he loaded the clip back in and prepared the weapon for a fight.

'Rala, you should probably get dressed.' John suggested because Rala was standing right in front of him, naked. Still, John could not get his eyes off her.



'Alright. I'll be down soon.' She acknowledged and ran back up to the second floor to get her armor dressed on.

At the same time, John approached the doors and removed the table as he was more than ready for a fight with the Brutes. John also noticed that right next to the door, there were two single-blade swords that reminded of European swords from Human history attached to a wall. John took both of them as they would serve well in close quarters combat.

When Rala came back down clad in her armor and armed with just a Plasma Pistol, John threw her one of the two swords and in return, she threw John his second M6C Magnum. John immediately dual-wielded the Magnums.

'Those are my father's!' Rala remarked about the swords, but John didn't really care whose were they, as they would serve their purpose of killing Brutes just fine.

'Rala, they'll do their job against the gorillas well.' John said, holstered one sword on his back and slowly opened the door. He stuck his gun outside and then moved outside himself, after making sure there were no Brutes.

'Come on, we've got to rally the troops if there are-' John's plan was to rally all battle capable Sangheili in the city, but Rala interrupted him.

'John! All our warriors are in the Vadam Keep, far away from here. If we do get there, the city will be ravaged by the time they get here.' She dismissed John's plan in an instant. John knew he couldn't take the Brutes all at once.

'What else? Can I call in support from the frigate? It has a company of Marines onboard ready and waiting for a signal to come down and fight.' John wanted to call down support from the UNSC Spear of Mars that was hovering in orbit, trying to avoid any combat or detection.

'That could incite anger amongst my people, butâ€¦ I fear we have no choice. There are too many Brutes here for us to take them all on. Your Marines could buy us time to rally the troops at the Keep. The Keep itself is just ten kilometers from here, closer than the Harbor is to it.' Rala pointed at the high Kolaar Mountain and John immediately cursed.

'Fuckâ€¦ climbing a mountainâ€¦ no thanks, I'd better call the Marines down.' John finished cursing and immediately called down the Marines from the UNSC Spear of Mars and asked for a Warthog. The Marines arrived just ten minutes later, armed fully for a war with M808 'Scorpion' Main Battle Tanks and M12 Force Application Vehicles, the Warthogs, armed with M41 Light Anti-Aircraft Guns and M68 Asynchronous Linear Induction Motors â€" Gauss Cannons.

The Marines managed to land at the beach without alerting anyone, which was a complete surprise to everyone. John and Rala approached the Marine Company that was gathering for an attack.

'Lieutenant, I want your men to deal with the Brutes inside the

city. Engage them in urban combat. Also, get a squad of your men ready to climb a mountain because they will need to inform the Soldiers of the State of Vadam about the situation in here.' John said and then took a look around the area. He noticed many options for stealth approaches from the rooftops of the small houses.

'Alright, Sir.' The Female Lieutenant ordered a squad of her best men to rally up on her location.

'Sarge, I'll need your guys to get up on that mountain and inform the Elites of the situation so that we may get reinforcements.' The Lieutenant briefed the squad of brave Marines while John turned to discuss a plan with Rala.

'So, ready to climb up a rooftop or two, Rala?' John said as he pointed at the nearest house that can easily be climbed up on.

'Uhâ€¦ what do you have in mind?' Rala asked while looking at the house and then turned to face John, but she noticed that he was already gone from that place that he stood on. She looked back at the house and noticed that he was already climbing on the two story house. It didn't take long for him to reach the rooftops and begin overlooking the streets in front of him. Rala joined him on the rooftops a while later, albeit it took her longer to climb up as she had not been trained in anything like that.

'I count at least six hundred Brutes here. I think they've begun their final, desperate pushes into Sanghelios.' John observed the Brutes stalking the streets. Suddenly, the Brutes began kicked down doors and entering houses.

'We've got to do something! They're going to slaughter innocents!'

Rala became seriously angered after seeing the Brutes throw young and old Sangheili males out of their houses. John held her back while he holstered his M6C Magnums. He pointed at a lone house where fewer Brutes entered.

'See that house over there? We'll get in there, kill the Brutes and signal the assault for the Marines from there.' John said and readied his sword. He began running across the rooftop and made a long jump across the street, landing on a house on the opposite side that was also on the opposite side of their destination. John approached the edge of the angled roof and passed his hand for Rala, in case she won't be able to land safely. Rala took a few steps back, made a run and jumped. She landed on the very edge, but John caught her and pulled her in on the roof.

'You need some more training, Rala.' John commented on Rala's lack of roof-jumping skills.

'Hmph.' Rala replied jealously, but still with a smile. John then silently jumped off the roof and awaited Rala's turn. Rala approached the edge of the roof and jumped off. She landed in John's hands who safely put her down on the ground. Rala was amazed at his strength that he managed to catch her without any problems.

'Alright, Rala, now we have to get inside undetected.' John said and approached the door, where a lone Brute was standing. John came

close to it and jumped on its back, snapped its head in a one hundred and eighty degree angle, and to top it all off, he cut the Brute's head off with the sword, throwing the head far away. The Brute's body fell on the ground.

'Alright, we're clear. Let's go.' John informed Rala and silently opened the door leading into the house that the Brutes entered. Upon entering, John saw purple blood trails everywhere, the most significant being the one leading upstairs.

'Rala, we've got contacts upstairs, most like-' John could not finish informing Rala, because he heard a Brute come out of a room from behind the stairs. He looked at the Brute and quickly ran into him with his sword stabbing it in the face and through its head into a nearby wall that supported the stairs. John sliced the Brute's face by moving the sword to the side, out of its head. The Brute was dead, but it stained the wall behind it.

'I'm going up.' Rala whispered and prepared her sword, along with her plasma pistol, to get ready for a fight with Brutes. After checking if the Brute is really dead, John followed Rala upstairs where she was preparing to breach and clear a room that had three Brutes in it along with a small Sangheili family of one male, one female and two Sangheili children.

'Rala, I'll enter through this room.' John whispered to Rala as soon as he reached her and after he finished observing the second floor. There was another room that was connected with the room that John needs to enter via a wall. After John entered that room, he ran straight to the wall, preparing to smash it down. He activated his VISR to scan the room and noticed that a Brute was standing right in front of him, so he prepared his sword and readied it in a stabbing position so that he may use his Spartan strength and precision to stab it into the Brute's heart through the wall.

'Rala, go!' John signaled for Rala through SQUADCOM and immediately stabbed the Brute through the wall. After the Brute was rendered harmless, John pulled the sword back and clutched his free hand into a fist, immediately punching the wall and breaking it down, allowing him to pass through it.

After John passed through, he immediately pulled his M6C from his thigh where it was magnetically attached to his armor and he aimed it at a Brute's head, instantly releasing four bullets into its head, killing it. While John was taking care of one of the Brutes, Rala fired an overcharged plasma pistol shot and while it was briefly stunned, she put a sword right in its gut and pulled it all the way up until it left the Brute's body from the tip of its head. The Brute was sliced in half, as it fell to the ground, lifeless.

'You're safe now.' John tried to reassure the Sangheili, but they didn't seem to understand what he said. Apparently, they didn't know how to speak in English. Also, they were rather afraid of him because he was standing in front of them in bulky and intimidating armor.

'Your helmet and language skills aren't helping.' Rala said as he gently pushed John aside and reassured the Sangheili in her language that John knew nothing of.

While the Sangheili were talking with each other, John opened a window and primed his M6C to fire a flare into the air. He attached a red flare rocket to the barrel's end and pointed it outside of the window, in the air. Soon after, John fired the rocket and it lit up the nearby streets. The Marines that were nearby immediately began their push into the city and they quickly encountered the Brutes. Upon meeting with the Brutes, the Lieutenant sent her best squad on a mission to climb the Kolaar Mountain and inform the Vadam Keep of the situation, even though the Keep's soldiers might murder every single one of them.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Draco III, UNSC Cataclysm, January 17<strong>\*\*\*th\*\*\*\*, 2553. 0834 hours by UTC.\*\*  
>'Establishing orbit around Draco III.' One of the officers in the bridge of the UNSC Cataclysm informed the ship's commanding officer  
â€œ Lieutenant Chris C-333.<p>

'Thank you.' Chris thanked the officer, dismissed him and approached the observation port at the front of the bridge where Draco III was clearly visible, its surface scarred from warfare between the United Nations Space Command and the Covenant Empire.

Draco III was Chris's homeworld and it felt good and bad returning to it. Good, because he hasn't seen it ever since he was orphaned for the SPARTAN-III Program. Bad, because the planet has been abandoned by the Humans after the massacre that the Covenant made by feeding the Human civilians to the Unggoy and Kig-Yar, the Grunts and Jackals. Plus, the world was glassed and was not pretty to look at after the Covenant came back to glass it after the Battle of Draco III.

'Sir, we've got an incoming hail from Sanghelios that the Brutes are making a final push with everything they've got. Perhaps we should slip in to help?' A Communications Officer informed the Lieutenant after intercepting a message from Sanghelios to the rest of the Sangheili colonies that had a firm Sangheili military presence. The message even went to UNSC space.

'Alright. Tanya, spin up the FTL drive and get us underway to Sanghelios.' Chris went away from the observation port that was in front of the bridge, back to his chair that was in the middle of the bridge. The ship immediately spun up its slipspace drive and entered the slipstream space with their destination being Sanghelios.

'What if we're too late?' Tanya asked just to be sure if Chris has a backup plan.

'We won't be late. We've got the fastest ship in the Galaxy, Tanya.' Chris replied, firmly believing that nothing bad will happen.

Meanwhile on Sanghelios, a squad of UNSC Marines consisting of twelve Marines, each armed with DMRs, Battle Rifles and Assault Rifles, was heading up on the Kolaar Mountain and soon after, they found a heavily guarded entrance in a cave with mounted plasma turrets manned by Elites as well as dozens of guards standing outside, suddenly pointing their guns at them.

The Marines immediately raised their weapons to respond, but none of the sides fired at the other until one of the Elites spoke in clear English.

'Humans, why are you here?' The Sangheili Ultra demanded to know when the squad leader, a Staff Sergeant, slowly came out in front of the squad.

'We're here to inform you that your city has been attacked by the Brutes! Our men are dying to protect something that you should've kept a closer eye on!' The Staff Sergeant was angered at the lack of action from the Sangheili.

The Sangheili Ultra growled silently and went to the edge of the cave to look over the city, noticing many burning houses. His eyes widened when he saw orange and blue explosions and shells exchange sides. The Sangheili Ultra immediately turned around.

'Get everyone down there!' He growled loudly this time and then looked at the Marines. 'Humans! You will follow my lead!' The Sangheili ordered and left the cave along with a squad of Marines and dozens of other Sangheili following him.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>One hour later, Sanghelios, January 17<strong>\*\*\*th\*\*\*\*, 0959 hours by UTC.

><strong>The battle for the city of Vadam was raging at full force as a massively outnumbered UNSC Marine company was fighting against a superior in numbers Brute force albeit the Jiralhanae weren't attacking with any tactics thus giving the Marines an easier time in defending their positions.

After one long hour of a brutal battle against the Brutes, the Sangheili had finally arrived to help the Marines that were defending the Sangheili city. The Sangheili immediately took the initiative while the Brute numbers were heavily depleted and the Elites charged off into battle from the back ranks of the Brutes, ravaging half of the Brute forces before they could even respond. With a joint counter-attack, the UNSC and the Sangheili encircled the Jiralhanae and slaughtered every last one of them in every brutal way possibly imagined by the Sangheili. The Sangheili were doing the main part of the executions.

The battle, which seemed to look like a loss, turned out to be a decisive victory for the Sangheili. The first one the Sangheili scored against the Brutes, raising the morale of the many.

'Oorah!' The Marines around the city were cheering with their rifles high up in the air. The Sangheili seemed to copy the style of Marine cheering and did the same " they raised their weapons in the air and yelled cheerfully, but their celebration was short-lived when an Assault Carrier, one of the last the Jiralhanae still had, entered the airspace of the State of Vadam.

John was hugging Rala in the main square which had a fountain in the middle of it. The two of them were actually in the fountain itself. John wanted to hold her forever, but his needs and thoughts were

interrupted when a massive shadow blocked out the sun. He released Rala to look behind him, where he noticed an Assault Carrier preparing to glass the surface of the planet.

'UNSC Spear of Mars, what the hell is going on? How did it get through?' John's mind was immediately filled with theories on how did the massive Assault Carrier got through.

'Captain, the ship smashed through the Sangheili lines and our MAC fire was ineffective against it. We considered to nuke it, but it was dangerously close to friendly warships.' The Commanding Officer of the UNSC Spear of Mars responded instantly as the Charon-class Light Frigate appeared on the horizon, firing its point-defense guns and missiles at the Assault Carrier, trying to gain its attention. The frigate was unsuccessful.

'Brace for glassing!' The female Lieutenant of the UNSC Marines shouted over the communication channels. John immediately embraced Rala, to safeguard her, but then he heard three loud bangs and three massive explosions.

Suddenly, the Assault Carrier's energy projector stopped charging and it began hurling down towards the desert far in the south. John looked up to find the source of the kill and noticed a massive UNSC Supercarrier flying by.

'UNSC Cataclysm to Captain John Sandman, I heard you needed a hand in repelling the Brutes from the Sangheili homeworld.' The Commanding Officer of the Cataclysm "Lieutenant Chris C-333" chimed in over the COM channels.

'Thanks for the assist, Chris. I thought we were going to turn into glass, but thanks.' John was most thankful for the Cataclysm's timely arrival. The ship's massive MAC cannons were enough to eliminate the Assault Carrier in time before it could begin glassing.

Suddenly, Rala's parents came to the main square to notice her hugging John. Rala's father was infuriated because he realized that it was interspecies love that he saw.

'You! Rala, how could you?! I thought I thought the two of you were just friends! Just! Friends! Not lovers!' Rala's father spoke in an infuriated tone. He saw interspecies love as a violation of Sangheili traditions.

'Father! No-' Rala moved away from John's embrace to go closer to her father who slapped her down on the ground. John, after seeing this, felt anger boiling within him.

'No one slaps Rala down! NO ONE!' John's mind was filled with thoughts of revenge, but he tried to convince himself that it's all going to pass.

'Father! I-' Rala tried to explain everything, but her father did not want to hear anything. He pulled out a Type-1 Energy Sword and lined up a clear stab to Rala's head. After seeing this, John immediately ran towards him and blocked Rala's father's hand.

'Don't you dare!' John looked at him angrily, through his visor.

'Don't meddle in affairs that aren't yours, Human!' Rala's father wanted to kill his daughter for the violation of the tradition and even tried to move the Spartan-IV out of his way, but he was unsuccessful. He then resorted to a fight. Rala's father punched John's helmet, forcing John away from him. This gave him precious seconds of lining up the stab again, but John retaliated almost instantly by punching the Sangheili Swordsmaster back, throwing him a few meters away. The Swordsmaster landed on the ground with his energy sword lying too far away from him to reach it in time. He looked up to notice the Human kneeling right in front of him.

'Don't you ever dare to touch Rala again, or I will be forced to break some of your bones.' John threatened the Sangheili Swordsmaster, who replied by simply moving his mandibles angrily. John didn't realize that he actually broke one of the mandibles' bones, but he realized that only after the Swordsmaster moved three out of four mandibles.

John quickly got back up and went to help Rala get back on her feet.

'Are you alright? Did he hurt you badly?' John wanted to be sure that Rala wasn't seriously hurt.

'No, no, I am alrightâ€¦ but, thanks.' Rala was always a follower of Sangheili warrior traditions, but after seeing what they really did, she decided to develop her own ways. 'John, Iâ€¦ I'm sorry that you were forced to knock my father outâ€¦ he has taught me everything and always put an emphasis on his hate towards other species.' Rala apologized for the last minute's event.

'No need to apologize, butâ€¦ does that mean you'll abandon me now?' John hung his head in pessimism, believing that she will abandon him to follow Sangheili traditions.

'No! I will never abandon you for some old traditions!' Rala said with her hand softly moving across John's helmet. John, slowly proceeded to remove his helmet, revealing his face to her, leaving it unobstructed for Rala's soft caressing.

Rala's mother simply stood on the side, speechless, but she knew love when she saw it. She had nothing against John's and Rala's union herself.

'Rala, I wish you find happiness with your choice.' Rala's mother finally spoke, breaking the two out of their romantic moment. John and Rala took a while to look around where they noticed Marines and Sangheili watching them, curiously. The two then turned their attention to Rala's mother who approached the two.

'I am already happy with my choice, mother.' Rala replied, putting her head on John's shoulder. Rala's mother smiled, forming her mandibles in the position of a smile. She then turned her gaze towards John.

'And you, John, may you keep my daughter safe from any dangers that

you will encounter during your lifetime. I know that nothing can separate you two now, so there is nothing much I can say or do. Just, be safe. Both of you.' Rala's mother then turned to the unconscious Swordsmaster and went to take care of him.

'And I will never abandon you, Rala.' John replied to a sentence that Rala previously said about her choice.

'Hey, John, I heard the Fire of Humanity will be ready for service again in less than a month.' John B-201 chimed in over the coms. Chris was shocked to find him still onboard the Cataclysm.

'John, what are you doing aboard? I thought you were on a ship en-route to Sanghelios!' Chris shockingly asked.

'Nah, I knew that you'd take a crew and make an immediate jump to help out the Elites.' John B-201 replied and calmly took his place next to Chris C-333 in the bridge of the Cataclysm.

'Rightâ€| anyways, hey Captain, wanna see some fireworks or are you going to head back to Earth?' Chris wanted to offer Captain John Sandman a chance to see some Brute ships getting handed ultra-heavy MAC discharges from the UNSC Cataclysm's MAC cannons.

'Nah, I think I'll head to Earth on the frigate.' Captain Sandman replied and ordered all the Marines to rally up in the square and be ready for pick-up.

'What are we going to do in the meanwhile?' Rala asked John, anxious to know of their next adventures.

'I have no idea, but I am sure I'll think of something.' John replied as the Pelican extraction arrived.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>One month later, February 18<strong>\*\*\*th\*\*\*\*, 2553, 1103 hours by UTC.\*\*

>One month after the Battle of the State of Vadam, one month after the beginning of the repairs and refits on the UNSC Fire of Humanity, Captain Sandman and his fully repaired and upgraded ship, along with an escorting fleet and the UNSC Cataclysm along with its escorting fleet arrived at Sanghelios and landed on the surface of the planet, near Kolaar Mountain. There, a bunch of Sangheili volunteers had signed on to serve in a Joint Human-Sangheili Battlegroup.<p>

The UNSC Fire of Humanity herself underwent massive design overhauls. Her length was increased from two and a half kilometers to four kilometers and three hundred meters. The height was increased to eight hundred meters and the width was increased to six hundred. It had eight frigate bays in the underbelly instead of the eight planned and could store eight Charon-class Light Frigates at any given time should the need arise or, six Light Frigates and two Heavy Destroyers that had the same size as the Charon-class Light Frigates. In addition to the new hangar bays and the increased size, it also had increased firepower. Five hundred 70mm 'Fortress' point-defense guns were installed all across the ship to protect it against any threats. Seven hundred missile pods were installed to accommodate three types of missiles, the Archer anti-ship missile, the Rapier anti-ship missile and the Howler anti-ship missile. Each of these



missiles have their own yields and penetrative powers, but they are all placed aboard the vessel, numbering in twenty thousand missiles. Mark 2488 Magnetic Accelerator Cannons were also installed on the sides of the ship to ensure it can give a proper broadside against any vessel, Covenant, Human or Forerunner. There are eight Mark 2488's on each side.

The thermonuclear weapons weren't forgotten as there are eight specialized pods for Shiva-class thermonuclear missiles or HAVOK Tactical Nuclear Missiles. There are a total of thirty two nuclear missiles of both types. The MAC system was upgraded to a newer version that was recently developed. The ship still has three MAC guns, but they are upgraded to deal higher amounts of damage and have higher velocities thanks to innovations in superconducting coil technology and shell technologies.

Covenant Assault Carrier shielding is also part of the UNSC Fire of Humanity's arsenal, as well as a new and improved slipspace drive that is based on Covenant slipspace drives. Only two other UNSC ships have faster slipspace drives as they are based on Forerunner technology.

The UNSC Fire of Humanity has an escort fleet of eight vessels for now, eight Charon-class Light Frigates, but HIGHCOM promised to give a proper fleet after the UNSC Navy has been entirely rebuilt.

The UNSC Cataclysm has undergone some refits as well, having ten hangar bays big enough to fit Charon-class Light Frigates in it and has an escort of ten Charon-class Frigates at all times. No armament refits were made, except for increased missile capacity as it can now carry twenty thousand missiles. Also, the old point-defense guns were swapped out for the new 70mm 'Fortress' PDGs and additional thermonuclear weapons were granted.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Sanghelios, Yermo, State of Vadam, Kolaar Mountain.<br>\*\*On Sanghelios, John's mission was to rally all the Sangheili volunteers who signed up to serve in the Joint Battlegroup after the Battle of the State of Vadam. There were representatives of every clan on Sanghelios, starting from the Vadam clan that had the most volunteers and ending with the Moram clan, which had just more than two hundred volunteers. In total, there were about nine thousand volunteers willing to serve with the Humans, to exchange tactics and gain additional training.

Captain John Sandman of the UNSC Navy, Captain William Taylor of the UNSC Marine Corps, Special Operations Officer Rala 'Thenam, Lieutenants John B-201 and Chris C-333 were all present for the greeting of the Sangheili recruits that were fresh out of training.

'Welcome, recruits. My name's Captain John Sandman and I will be your new commanding officer. From now on, you will address me as 'Captain' or 'Sir'. You will be serving the first Joint interspecies Battlegroup ever commissioned by the UNSC. You should feel honored! This Battlegroup will help our two races to improve relations and exchange knowledge of warfare and should it prove to be a success, our two races will become closer than ever before! Now, you will be divided into units known as battalions and you will be mixed with

Human Marines. You will be stationed aboard the ships in our Joint Species Battlegroup, with the most of you being placed on the UNSC Fire of Humanity and the UNSC Cataclysm. You will be armed to the teeth with whatever the UNSC and the Sangheili can offer you and you will treat every Human with respect, to receive that same respect in return! So, if any of you have second thoughts about joining this Battlegroup, I suggest you go away now.'" John gave a speech about what will happen to the Sangheili and how should they work. The Sangheili took a short while to think about everything and then, with an unflinching resolve, they stood their ground. They were ready to serve on Human ships, with Humans.

'Very well. Prepare to be loaded in your ships. Captain Scarecrow will name each one of you and tell you to which battalion and ship you will belong to.'" John finished his speech and let Captain Scarecrow speak. He had a datapad in his hands with all the names of the volunteers and their new battalions.

And so, about three hours later, each and every Sangheili was loaded into UNSC ships and was ready to serve alongside the battle-hardened UNSC Marines that survived the entire war.

The Joint Battlegroup departed the Urs-Fied-Joori system, heading for the Sol System where they will await new orders.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Well, it was quite interesting writing this chapter and I hope you've enjoyed it. Don't forget to leave a review, favorite/follow to support me and Toruscan. Thank you, everyone.\*\*

#### 4. Neru Pe 'Odosima

\*\*Hey guys/girls, sorry for the late update. I have applied to study at a Naval College, so I will be spending less time writing, but I will still write and try to publish as fast as I can, so don't you worry guys/girls, but there is also some hope - I might have Fridays off, thought I have to confirm this first. If that's true, then that means more time spent on the FF. Anyways, I hope you enjoy the chapter, so... dive in!

><strong>

\* \* \*

><p><strong>One year after the Battle of Sanghelios.<br>\*\*The UNSC Battlegroup, now named UNSC Battlegroup Foxtrot, that was led by Captain John Sandman was stationed next to Jupiter, to be ready to respond in the event of an imminent threat to Earth or Mars. The Battlegroup received extra ships over time, like the refit Halcyon-class Light Cruisers, some Paris-class Heavy Frigates, UNSC Prowler-class Stealth Corvettes and UNSC Heavy Destroyers, all of them outfitted with the latest shields, slipspace drives and armament.

When the final warship was given, Battlegroup Foxtrot consisted of six Halcyon-class Light Cruisers, eighteen Charon-class Light Frigates, ten Paris-class Light Frigates, two Prowlers and six Heavy Destroyers plus the two flagships - the refit Phoenix-class

Battlecruiser/Carrier hybrid UNSC Fire of Humanity and the Battleship/Supercarrier hybrid UNSC Cataclysm.

The SPARTAN-III Headhunters Chris C-333 and John B-201 were both promoted to Commander and Lieutenant Commander respectively so that they can have more authority over the ones that they command.

Captain Sandman was not promoted to a Rear Admiral, as one would expect, to lead the Battlegroup. His rank was still a Captain, but being under his command was enough for everyone in the Battlegroup to know that he knows how to lead large forces with a small rank.

UNSC Battlegroup Foxtrot was put under the direct command of the Chief of Naval Operations and the Commander-in-Chief of the United Nations Space Command " Lord Terrence Hood, but it was still allowed to roam freely around UNSC-controlled space at will.

January 19th, 2554, 2253 hours by UTC. UNSC Fire of Humanity, Training Deck. In orbit around Jupiter, near Europa.

Rala was visiting the training deck on the ship that was occupying the space of eight normal decks. The ship had a total of 198 decks that made up the eight hundred meter height, minus the observation area at the ventral fore that runs lower, adding an extra two hundred meters to the total height. One deck's height was four meters, so the training deck was thirty two meters in height and ran the length of one kilometer. It was located near the top of the ship's hull.

Her visit was purely out of curiosity, to see how the Sangheili and Humans were getting along. It seemed at first that the Sangheili did not entirely trust the Humans, but some were developing friendly relations already. Suddenly and accidentally, she ran into Captain William 'Scarecrow' Taylor, who was having a conversation with Chris C-333, John B-201 and Commander Lowell that too were visiting the training deck, but they had a conversation about the Captain. Rala tried to eavesdrop on their conversation, but then she was caught by Chris.

'Rala. What are you doing here?' Chris asked and then Rala tried to find a proper explanation.

'Just wandering around.' Rala answered after a while.

'Rala, we need to discuss something important about Captain Sandman.' Chris said and asked Rala to join their little circle of discussion.

'What? A rebellion?' Rala wanted to know for sure if they're planning a rebellion.

'What? Hell no! We're lucky to have a tactician like him. It's about his birthday that's tomorrow.' John B-201 dismissed Rala's idea as a lie.

'Oh" wait, what's a birthday?' Rala asked because the Sangheili don't celebrate 'birthdays'.

'Well, to put it short, a birthday is a special day that occurs once a year for every person. It's celebrated in the day the person was

born to mark another year of his or her life.'" Captain Taylor put it shortly.

'Yeah, we're just unsure of what to gift him.'" Commander Lowell said and then looked at Rala, who seemed confused. Gifts, birthdays, all of this was as alien to her as the Mgalekgolo, the Hunters, to Humans. 'A gift is given to the one celebrating his birthday. It's an honor to do so.'"

'John loves different styles of combat. He also expressed a wish to deepen his knowledge in sword combat, but he could not acquire a proper sword.'" Rala suggested a possibility.

'Hmâ€¦ I have a family Katana stashed somewhere in my personal quarters. It was made one hundred years ago, but it is coated with Titanium-A that allows it to cut tougher materials. I have no use for it anyways.'" Commander Lowell offered his family's Katana that he had no use for, personally.

'What's a Katana?'" Rala asked, being curious about what the Commander meant.

'A Katana is a traditional sword made in Japan, Earth. It is made with the highest quality that a forger can achieve and it is made to be extremely sharp. It's quite possibly the best sword ever made by Humanity.'" Commander Lowell explained and the rest seem to agree that it should be a gift for the Captain.

'What about you three?'" Rala asked, wanting to know if they would gift him something.

'I might give him a weapon from our arsenal. That weapon would come from me and John, both.'" Chris explained and then Rala turned her gaze towards Captain Taylor.

'I deliver the cake.'" Taylor said with his hands crossed. Then everyone turned their gaze towards Rala.

'What will you be giving to our Captain?'" Everyone asked seemingly at the same time.

'I have no idea, honestlyâ€¦'" Rala answered and hung her head, but then Commander Lowell came to suggest something.

'Your presence should be enough. We weren't planning on celebrating Captain Sandman's birthday without his alien girlfriend.'" Commander Lowell cheered up the Sangheili female.

'Really?'" She felt better already.

'Yes, indeed.'" Captain Taylor confirmed Commander Lowell's words, and so did John B-201 and Chris C-333, both by nodding.

'Well, thenâ€¦ anything I should change?'" Rala wanted to know if there's some special rule.

'No, I think you'll be fine, but don't blame me. I'm not an expert on alien looks.'" Chris answered without examining Rala.

'Wellâ€¦ when was John born?'" Rala asked and then Captain Taylor

pulled up his cybernetic right arm in which he had a datapad.

'Captain John Sandman was born in 2530, January 20th, approximately at 1937 hours by United Terran Calendar.' Captain Taylor answered Rala's question and then Rala left the training deck, while the group kept discussing the details.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Captain's quarters, UNSC Fire of Humanity, January 20<strong>\*<strong>th\*\*\*\*, 0031 hours by UTC.  
><strong>Rala arrived in the room that John Sandman shared with her and noticed that he was sitting in his grey officer's uniform of the 2530s that he liked a lot, while busy reading a datapad next to an observation port, a window, and observing the space. He was sitting in a comfortable chair made of leather, wood and metal and he had his feet crossed and on a table.

'Hey, John.' Rala was informing John that she had returned.

'Hey.' John replied instantly while still reading the datapad. He threw the datapad on the table, put his feet on the ground and stood up to meet Rala. He approached her and gave her a gentle kiss on her mandibles to which she gladly responded by giving another. The two then moved back to take a breath.

'How was your day inspecting the Sangheili part of the crew?' John asked while moving his hands around Rala's waist.

'Well, both of our races are getting along fine. The Sangheili are actually speaking with the Humans now and asking for their names. A name is a very honorable thing in our culture, you know.' Rala answered John's question, satisfying his curiosity for a while.

'I see.' John replied and began softly kissing Rala's neck.

'John, please, not today.' Rala tried politely to get John off. She wanted to save this moment for tomorrow, as her gift to him.

'Alright.' John released Rala, but she softly hugged him, before letting him go.

'I'm going to take a rest. If you want you can join me now, or later.' John informed Rala and made five steps to reach his bed where he lied down and immediately fell asleep.

Rala silently joined him, after she locked the doors. She was thinking of tomorrow and if her present will really make John feel a lot better.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>January 20<strong>\*<strong>th\*\*\*\*, 1131 hours by UTC, Wardroom (Commissioned Officer Mess Hall), Bridge Deck.  
><strong>Captain Taylor, Commander Lowell, Commander Chris C-333 and Lieutenant Commander John B-201 and Rala assembled in the Wardroom

where they got ready to congratulate Captain John Sandman on his twenty fourth birthday. Rala was sent out to lead John into the Hall, and so she went to the bridge â€" the only place where John spends his day in.

Rala, upon entering the bridge, immediately rushed to John, who was standing next to the holo-table in his officer's uniform and doing nothing, except for staring at the table and simply breathing heavily. Rala grabbed him by his arm and pulled him outside of the bridge in a hurry.

'What's the hurry, Rala?' John asked upon using his strength to stop her from dragging him any further.

'Well, follow me to the Wardroom and you'll see for yourself.' Rala said and immediately led John four hundred meters further to the aft side of the ship. There, Rala ran first inside the Hall and John followed soon after.

He opened the doors and entered, noticing only darkness. Suddenly, the lights turned on and a few of his friends were standing four meters in front of him.

'Surprise! Happy twenty fourth birthday!' Captain Taylor, Commanders Lowell and Chris C-333, Lieutenant Commander John B-201 and Rala congratulated Captain John Sandman on his birthday.

'Congrats, brother.' Chris said and handed John a gift from his personal armory.

'It's from me and John, soâ€¦ open it up.' Chris said and John began examining the box. There was something similar to a side-arm in there and when John opened the box by removing its cover, he found a Z-110 Directed Energy Pistol/Exotic, the 'Boltshot'.

'Nice.' John said as he took aim from the iron sights, aiming on the floor. 'Thanks.' John thanked Chris C-333 and John B-201 for the present and he holstered it to his belt via magnetic lock.

The next one was Commander Lowell coming up with something rather long in his hands. Long and a bit curved.

'This is from my personal stash.' Commander Lowell informed and gave the wrapped up present to Captain Sandman. Captain Sandman touched the edges but felt something blunt in there. He unwrapped the present and noticed the hilt of a sword first and then a black sheath. He wrapped his hand around the hilt and pulled whatever item might be in the sheath, when he noticed a shiny Katana sword emerge. It seemed like brand new.

'Woah.' John was amazed to see an actual Katana in his hands.

'It must've taken a lot to turn it into a present for someone else, Commander.' Captain Sandman commented, thinking that Commander Lowell had problems giving the sword away.

'No, it wasn't much of a problem, really. I didn't know how to use it, or how to wield or, nor did I have the necessary will to actually learn sword combat, so I decided to give it to someone who wants it

more than I do.'" Commander Lowell revealed to the Captain.

'Thanks, anyways, Commander.'" John thanked for the gift and sheathed the Katana back in its sheath and placed it on his belt, again, by a magnetic lock.

'Oh, before you move on to Captain Taylor's present, I have to add that the Katana has an overlay of Titanium-A. So, yeah, you have a ship in your hands. A very sharp ship.'" The Commander added and moved aside.

\_'Nice.'\_' John thought and moved closer to his Marine Captain "William Taylor.

'I brought the cake and drinks!'" Taylor said and put down a cake on the nearby table and moved his arm out from his back. In that arm, he had a bucket with ice and two half a liter bottles of Champagne, recently delivered from the Champagne region of France. After putting the bucket on the table, next to the cake, he went straight for the glasses that were in a shelf ten meters from their current location "the frontal end of the Wardroom. Not sure if Rala would be able to drink or eat purely Human food and drink, he still took a glass for her. While he was getting the glasses, John popped open one bottle with his new Katana sword, instead of a sabre used for 'sabrages'.

'Nice one, Captain.'" Commander Lowell commented on John's skill, as he accurately cut open the very tip of the head of the bottle. Captain Taylor put the glasses on the table and John began pouring the champagne into them, very carefully. He was holding a glass in hand, tilted slightly towards the bottle and was pouring the champagne in slowly, to avoid losing most bubbles. He gave the first glass to Rala, without even asking what gift will she present to him. He simply smiled at her and made her blush by that.

After pouring the final glass, the one for himself, with champagne, he raised it slightly above his shoulder, in the air.

'A toast.'" John wanted to think of something good, but after realizing that it's impossible, reverted to first thing that came in his mind. 'Uh" to joy!'" John said after stumbling for a moment on his words and the group proceeded to clink their glasses after that.

'Hear hear.'" Everyone acknowledged the toast and began to drink it, while Rala was lingering, not sure if she can drink it or not.

'What's wrong, Rala?'" John approached her and wrapped a hand around her waist, while keeping his glass firmly in his other hand. He was standing in front of her, blocking her from the eye-sight of the rest.

'I'm not sure if I can drink it.'" She said, staring into her glass. She had different mouth features which made it harder to drink from a glass, but she still attempted to do so by sealing her mandibles tight enough, avoiding anything from the drink to spill out. She swallowed the sip that she made and immediately felt a light reaction. It was getting a bit colder for her as she had first tried

an alcoholic drink.

'Johnâ€¦ it'sâ€¦ it's freezing for me.' Rala said while she put the glass on the table and immediately wrapped her arms around John to try and heat herself up using John's body.

'Oh damn.' John cursed upon hearing this, but when Rala wrapped around him, he did feel her body to be a bit cooler than usual.

'We'll go back to my cabin and I'll heat it up for you.' John informed Rala and turned his gaze towards the other four friends.

'Hey, guys, enjoy your time without me. There's an emergency here.' John said and began dragging Rala out of the Wardroom. While he was still inside it, John grabbed her in his hands and began carrying her to his private quarters.

John's private quarters weren't too far, they were three hundred meters from the Wardroom to the fore, to the side of the bridge.

Upon entering, John immediately went to the bed where he placed Rala down. He ran back the doors to seal them, preventing the heat from escaping and he instantly ran to his personal computer, which doubled as a control console, and activated the heater.

Rala was still shivering from the cold and John decided to help her heat up by hugging her. He approached her in the bed, but upon sitting down on the edge, Rala grabbed him by his forearm and pulled him directly above her. She immediately took control as she turned herself and John around, with him being below and her being above.

'So, this was all a trick?' John figured out that Rala was simulating.

'Well, after consuming the drink you call 'Champagne' it was real. After we left the Wardroom it was a lie. Didn't you feel me getting warmer in your hands?' Rala confirmed John's realization and leaned closer to him.

'Noâ€¦ You tricky girl.' John commented on her skills of deception. 'But what about your gift for my birthday?' John asked out of curiosity what could've Rala gotten for him.

'Well, you'll see it pretty soon. Or should I say, feel it.' Rala answered as she slowly approached John's lips with her mandibles.

She began kissing John, who responded back to her by kissing her as well. They kissed very passionately for a moment until they had to pull back from the kiss to take a breath. They kept close to each other, with only a small gap maintained between them.

Suddenly, that gap became smaller as they went for more kissing. This time with more caressing. John ran his hands across Rala's back, while Rala was running hers across his chest. They continued this activity for a long while, until they began undressing each other.



Rala could easily remove John's top, while it took a lot longer for John to remove Rala's combat harness.

After removing Rala's combat harness, they continued kissing again. John and Rala switched positions, with John being on top and Rala below. This time, they undressed during the kiss, while Rala was slowly removing her undersuit. John planted many kisses on her neck and after the undersuit was completely removed, he moved lower than the neck " down to her breasts and then lower to her stomach. John's hand even went down to her slit, where it began slightly pleasuring the area.

The ensuing foreplay caused a great deal of arousal to both, John and Rala, but Rala was more aroused from it because she was the receiver and she was already letting out a few silent moans.

John kept planting kisses over Rala's body, until he removed his officer's pants and boots. From that moment, Rala took over and began caressing John's chest and stomach, occasionally running down to the crotch where she could feel John's arousal in its physical form. She lied down next to John, with her entire body still touching his. The two of them slowly began kissing romantically, while Rala was gently running across John's body.

After a while of kissing each other repeatedly and with great romance, they finally moved on to the more intimate part " the coitus.

John slowly removed his underpants and observed Rala's body again, just like he did in the first time that he shared the intimate moment with her. She still hadn't changed at all, still the same beautiful looks, still the same breast size. Still the way he loved her.

'Come on, Spartan, don't keep a girl waiting.' Rala smiled and commented as she was ready for John to continue. John slowly approached her and stopped when he was right on top of her, giving her another wave of kisses while Rala's hand, that was slowly moving around John's chest, moved lower to the crotch where she wrapped her fingers around his manhood, as she directed it inside of her slit. While John was busy with kissing on one end, he slowly began to thrust in and out of Rala's womanhood.

A short while later, instead of the act being like the first time, Rala quickly turned around with John finding himself below her. Now, Rala was in control and she was the one controlling the act. Now, Rala slightly lifted her body, while John's manhood was still inside of her and then immediately went back down. She began riding him. Hearing soft moans, having Rala gently riding him and being in a sexual act with his Sangheili girlfriend made John feel better than ever.

Rala leaned down closer to John while he put his hands around her thighs. The two continued this up for a long while, until Rala felt a bit too exhausted. John took over and began thrusting upwards and downwards. He could feel pressure building up in his member and he immediately switched control with Rala, appearing above her.

Rala could feel the pleasure build even higher and become even more powerful. John had a sudden idea in mind and he immediately executed

that idea. He wrapped his hands around Rala and immediately got up with her in his hands, while quickly stepping off the bed and turning to face the wall. Now, with Rala against the wall and in his hands, he continued thrusting in and out of her while looking into her eyes. John could tell that she seemed surprised by this sudden move, but she wasn't disappointed. It felt a lot better for her, to be held in John's hands and being pleased.

After two minutes of uninterrupted mating, the two finally gave way to their orgasm and moaned loudly, as John quickly fell to the side with Rala still firmly in his hands. John had released his load inside of Rala, again, but she did not object. It was a warm feeling inside of her, along with the orgasm. John was lying sideways on the bed with Rala right on top of him, both of them still feeling their orgasm.

Both of them had forgotten all their troubles. Both were panting after the joy and looking into each other's eyes.

A moment of silence ensued as the two recovered their breaths from the extremely pleasant experience.

'Well, are you feeling warmer now?' John joked about Rala's trick that she played on him and smiled to that.

'A lot warmer.' Rala replied and turned her gaze down to her crotch where she noticed that John was still inside of her.

'You want to go for another round?' Rala said, noticing that John is still capable of engaging in an intercourse.

'I would love to, but, duty waits.' John tried to get Rala off, but she used her strength to pin him down to the bed. John noticed that, but didn't use his strength to break free.

'Well, only because you want that.' John agreed to continue, as secretly he wanted to himself. John and Rala continued their mating for a while until they had their second orgasm and they needed to rest, to sleep for a while.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>January 20<strong>\*\*th\*\*\*\*, 2554, 1631 hours by UTC. UNSC Fire of Humanity, Captain's Quarters.

><strong>John woke up after a nap, still remembering his coitus with Rala. When he turned to see Rala, he noticed that she was gone and that the ship was shaking badly. He needed to take a quick wash of himself and he quickly ran into the shower and made a lightning fast wash. He then quickly dressed himself with his officer's suit, put on the UNSC cap and grabbed the M6C along with his new Katana. He ran outside of his room to find UNSC naval personnel running around the deck. He stopped one to get a situation report.

'What's going on, Ensign?' John asked, thinking that the ship is being attacked.

'Sir, we're being boarded by Sangheili who call themselves the Neru Pe 'Odosima. The Servants of Abiding Truth, Captain.' The Ensign replied. John looked confused and pondering on this sudden aggression from this splinter group.

'They're using weapons that were captured and stored on Earth, in a half a dozen ONI warehouses.' The Ensign added and then proceeded to direct the Captain in the direction of the fight.

'Deck 134 is having the bloodiest battle. Currently, Spec Ops Officer 'Thenam is leading the fight there, but they're getting cornered.' After giving the location of the fight, John immediately ran off, straight to the nearest elevator. Once inside the elevator, he primed his M6C for a fight and put one hand on his Katana to get ready for slicing in case the Sangheili rebels have taken the elevators.

The elevator arrived in a short time and upon opening, John encountered two Servants. He immediately stabbed one straight through the back of his head and put his entire magazine in the head of the other one.

'Sir, we've got reports from the other ships of the Battlegroup. They are invading our ship only, but what could they be searching for? They've got an entire Fleet waiting three hundred thousand kilometers from our current position.' Commander Lowell chimed in through the communicator.

'Perhaps to kidnap someone or steal our brand new ARC-920s?' John assumed that the Servants wanted to steal the Asymmetric Recoilless Carbine-920's. The Railguns.

'Hey John, we've got decks one hundred thirty five to one hundred ninety eight secured. Moving up to your deck now.' Chris C-333 chimed in and reported that many decks of the UNSC Fire of Humanity are secured and back in the firm control of the UNSC.

'Acknowledged. Hurry up, I don't have my power armor on to protect me from plasma bursts.' John commented and left the elevator immediately and took a route taking him to the aft of the ship, where Rala and her Marines were bunkered down inside a hangar.

John ran off at the fastest speed he could uphold as a SPARTAN-IV, but he encountered a fireteam-sized unit of Servants sieging an entrance into the hangar bay. He immediately loaded a fresh magazine into his M6C and pulled out his Katana from its sheath.

'Time to die, assholes.' John commented before emptying his clip in the heads of two Servants and slicing up two more, but another one knocked him back and growled.

'Die, Human scum!' The Sangheili said clearly in English and attempted to stomp John's head, but the Captain's timely reaction saved his life as he rolled away in the nick of time. He quickly got up and made a backwards thrust using a reverse grip with his sword into the spine of the Sangheili rebel, instantly paralyzing him, but not killing him. The Sangheili couldn't stand on his feet anymore, but John was keeping him on his feet with his sword, though the two were pointing their backs at each other.

'Who's your leader? Who supplied you?' John immediately began questioning the Servant.

'No one! We are ruled by Bishop Avu Med 'Telcam and no one else!'  
The Sangheili responded, albeit with a voice full of pain. John slightly turned his sword, which was still inside the spine of the Sangheili. Blood began to pour outside of the wound.

'Lies! How did you gain access to weapons stored on Earth!'  
John was wasting his time by questioning the Sangheili, while meanwhile in the hangar, the company-sized unit of Servants had breached the doors and were encircling Rala, her twenty Marines and three Sangheili Minors.

'WHO?!' John was as enraged as he got impatient. He was ready to move the sword right upwards, to cut open the spine entirely.

'Your intelligence!'  
The Sangheili answered before passing out. John slashed his spine open and with his reverse grip, he immediately stabbed in the back of the head of the Sangheili, before he fell on the ground. After removing the Katana from the Sangheili's head and putting it back into his sheath, John prepared to enter the hangar bay. He approached the door that the Servants were trying to breach and entered a code to open it. When the doors opened, he noticed Rala being dragged away in a Phantom dropship.

'Rala! NO!'  
John fell on his knees as he knew that he was helpless to stop them. He thought that they will most likely kill Rala in captivity to demoralize him, but he didn't know why would they do that. John knew that he would commit suicide if he finds Rala's lifeless body, but he still couldn't stop the dropship from escaping. Rala helped him recover from his first two tragedies.

'John!'  
Chris shouted while running towards the Captain, along with a fireteam of Marines and John B-201, both of them clad in their MJOLNIR MARK X Powered Assault Armor.

John slightly turned his head to see them approaching from the corner of his eye. He didn't want to get up to meet them as he felt too pathetic.

'John!'  
Chris made a slide to John's position and got up as soon as he was right next to him. He kneeled down to look him in the eyes.

'What happened, brother? What happened here?'  
Chris referred to John as his brother-in-arms and wanted to know what happened. He could see a tear falling from his eyes.

'Shit, from what Commander Lowell told me, he barely lived past the past two losses. I doubt he'll cope with this one.'  
Chris thought in his mind and noticed that John finally opened his mouth to say something.

'They took her! They took Rala!'  
John said as he remembered the sight of her struggling and then getting knocked out by one of the more higher ranked Sangheili rebels.

'Damn.'  
John B-201 commented while putting his M395 DMR on safety and holstering it behind his back.

'Look, you'll find her bro, but we've got a mission. We need to

cross a slipspace inter-universe portal.'" John B-201 said and Captain Sandman finally got up, looking at his M6C.

'Now, don't you think about quitting!'" Chris said as he took the M6C and the Katana from John Sandman. John sighed.

'I've got a better idea.'" John spoke, thinking about the new mission.

'Chris, take the rest of Battlegroup Foxtrot and enter that slipspace portal. I will take the Fire of Humanity, eight frigates and two Halcyon-class Light Cruisers and will pursue the Servants of Abiding Truth.

'As long as you don't think about leaving it all behind.'" Chris acknowledged the idea and ordered a Pelican to be readied.

'Alright, we'll do it.'" John B-201 commented and went into the nearest Pelican dropship with Chris.

'Captain Taylor and Commander Lowell will watch over you, though.'" Chris C-333 said shortly before entering the Pelican which later took off and left the UNSC Fire of Humanity.

'Tanya, prepare a slipspace jump to the portal.'" Chris commanded Tanya to spin up the FTL drive through the communications that Captain Sandman could still hear.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Twenty minutes later, UNSC Fire of Humanity's bridge.<br>\*>John arrived in the bridge, looking as awful as two years before â€" massively demoralized.

'Captain, are you alright?'" Commander Lowell wanted to know if the Captain is still capable of commanding.

'Huh? Ohâ€| yeah, yeah. Order all the frigates to get inside and for the rest of the ships to prepare a slipspace jump to the slipspace wake of the Servant Fleet.'" John raised his head up and immediately began commanding, showing his determination to find Rala. He stood up and stood straight in a very military fashion, showing his iron will.

'Our FTL drive is ready for slipspace travel. Heading to the slipspace wake right now.'" The ship's AI â€" Jessica â€" chimed in, reporting of the situation. The UNSC Fire of Humanity and the two Halcyon-class Light Cruisers immediately flew to the last known destination of the Servant Fleet that left the system almost immediately after Rala was captured.

Now John was determined as ever to burn down entire planets to find the person he loves most.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Just to clear it up to you guys, 'Neru Pe 'Odosima'' means 'Servants of Abiding Truth' in ancient Sangheili. This faction has been in existence for a very long time. Longer than the

Covenant Empire itself and dates back to the Sangheili-San 'Shyuum War. They were merged with the Covenant Remnant (Storm Covenant) somewhere around 2553-2555 and began acting as enemies of Humanity. Again.<br>Anyways, I hope you liked it, so... leave your thoughts in a review. Thank you for your support.\*\*

## 5. Neru Pe 'Odosima, Part 2

\*\*Hey readers, bringing you another chapter in this fanfic. Enjoy the read.

>I am still looking for people who would be brave enough to draw some fanart for me, anyone who's good at drawing or knows someone who is good, don't hesitate<br>\*\*

\* \* \*

><p><strong>January 22nd, 2554, UNSC Fire of Humanity's bridge. In slipspace.<br>\*\*John was in a state of very deep pondering, while sitting on his Captain's chair in his 2530s grey officer's uniform and a cap with a graceful leaf ornament around it.

'Captain, we're about to leave slipspace.' Said one of the two navigation officers and the holo-table activated with a hologram popping out. The UNSC Fire of Humanity and two Halcyon-class Light Cruisers were depicted as barely visible, because they were still in another dimension " slipstream space, but they were marked with UNSC flags. The ships were meant to stay in slipspace for thirty more seconds, and then they should appear close to an unidentified planet just outside the Orion Arm of the Galaxy.

In just after thirty seconds, the portion of the Battlegroup Foxtrot left slipspace about one million kilometer from their planet, right where John planned to leave. The Halcyon-class Light Cruisers left slipspace one second later and immediately assumed their positions on the portside and starboard sides of the flagship.

'Sir, what should we do next?' Jessica popped up from her holo-tank in full figure, with her ODST armor.

'We scan the system, Jessica. Activate long-range scanners and immediately chart the system. I want to know every possible area for a base and I want to know every possible area for a hideout large enough to hide a fleet of ten ships.' John wanted to have every corner of the system revealed to his ship's maps, because his determination to do something was higher than ever before. John would bombard a sun just to get to Rala and rescue her.

'Sir, the scan will take a while. I suggest we head closer to that planet over there. The scan of it is finished and I have marked it as an Earth-like planet with lush vegetation and vast oceans, but only two continents. The planet has numerous islands, though, but no civilization is detected. Perhaps they're pre-industrial?' Jessica informed the Captain and kept using a portion of the scanners to find civilization on the planet, when suddenly something interesting popped up on the scanners.

'Captain, I've found a Shield Dome on the largest of the two continents, right in the middle of it. It occupies an area of one square kilometer.' Jessica reported, but John thought that it might

be a trap, an EMP trap.

'Keep scanning the system, Jessica. I don't want to fall into a trap.' John wanted to avoid any possible traps.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Meanwhile, 1 Ly from the Sol System's Oort cloud, UNSC Cataclysm's bridge.<br>\*\*\*'Commander, all ships are accounted for. We are ready to proceed with the travel.' One of the ensigns in the bridge of the Cataclysm informed Commander Chris C-333.

'Very well. Tanya, get us through there.' Chris wanted to get to the next universe as soon as possible, because he knew that this slipspace 'gate' will lead them to the same universe where Tali, Krilus and Edward are at. The slipspace portal looked the same as an ordinary slipspace tunnel entrance, but it was being opened by four small space stations that were built around slipspace drives.

The slipspace drives activated on all four stations and the Battlegroup was getting ready to move past the tunnel, when suddenly eight extra ships joined. Three Phoenix-class Colony Ships, one Marathon-class Heavy Cruiser and four Destroyers. One of the Phoenix-class Colony Ships was carrying four extra slipspace drives while another was carrying the small stations. The third was carrying military personnel and materials needed to establish a base.

'Commander, we're ready to proceed.' The addition to the Battlegroup reported and it immediately poured through the slipspace tunnel along with the rest of the group.

It took only a short while for the entire Battlegroup Foxtrot to emerge out of slipspace in orbit of an unidentified Earth-like world that was eight hundred kilometers larger than Earth in diameter and it was hidden inside a nebula. The planet also had a stronger magnetic field which emitted a sort of 'aura' from it. It had seven moons out of which only two were perfect for sustaining Human life. It reminded a bit of Reach by the arrangements of the continents, but it definitely wasn't the same.

'Commander, we'll establish a base on this planet and we'll create a slipspace gateway.' The Commanding Officer of one of the Phoenix-class Colony Ships informed the Executive Officer of the Battlegroup "Commander Chris C-333.

'How did they even manage to create something like this?' Chris asked his favorite AI "Tanya.

'They have been digging through the Cataclysm's navigation data.' Tanya responded and by the word 'They' she really meant the Office of Naval Intelligence.

'Uh-huh.' Chris acknowledged and then decided to explore around a bit. 'Tanya, I want to find Tali, Krilus and Edward. I know we're in the right universe for that, so, please, take us to the nearest relay or whatever those things were called.' Chris gave the order and even kindly asked to execute it.

'What about the rest of the Battlegroup?' Tanya was getting a bit

more curious about the dozens of ships that might be left without a temporary flagship.

'Tell them to establish a defense grid around our new military colony.' Chris ordered and Tanya immediately executed it by sending a message to all the ships. The message contained an order to defend the planet until either the return of the UNSC Cataclysm or the arrival of the UNSC Fire of Humanity.

'It's done, Chris. Shall we get a move on?' Tanya was done with the previous order and was ready for the move order.

'Do it.' Tanya said and with that, the UNSC Cataclysm swiftly entered slipspace en-route to what Tanya believed was the closest mass relay.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Halo Universe, an unidentified star system outside of the Orion Arm, Milky Way Galaxy. January 22<strong>\*\*\*nd\*\*\*\*, 2554, UNSC Fire of Humanity's Training Deck.

><strong>The Training deck of the UNSC Fire of Humanity was teeming with life as new members along with the more experienced ones were training and honing their physical skills in this deck. The 89th Shock Company which was recently renamed into 'Dog Company', like the other companies on the ship, was trying its best to get ready for a new mission in hell.

Suddenly, Captain John Sandman himself entered the Training Deck via an elevator, wearing his black MJOLNIR GEN2 PAA/Recruit with a red dragon whose wings are spread out drawn on his customized chest piece. The Captain was observing every Marine on the deck.

Marine Captain Taylor approached Captain Sandman and began questioning what brought the Captain of the ship down to the training deck.

'Sir!' Captain Taylor saluted to his superior officer, the UNSC Navy's Captain John Sandman.

'At ease, Scarecrow.' Captain Sandman addressed Taylor by his nickname.

'Sir, what brings you down here? You know that Dog Company is always ready to step feet first.' Scarecrow was most curious to find out the reasons behind this sudden visit.

'I know that Dog Company is always prepared, but I wanted to issue a new order to them myself.' Captain Sandman surprised Scarecrow when he mentioned an order.

'What order?' Scarecrow asked, wanting to know it first.

'To drop down and secure an LZ for a larger attack force.' John replied, but suddenly, the entire deck lit up red from an alarm.

'All hands, get to your action stations. The Sangheili rebels are attacking us. This is not a drill, I repeat, this is not a drill. Tactical Condition is Alpha Two.' Jessica, the AI of the ship,



announced over the internal loudspeakers. John immediately dropped his idea of informing Dog Company of their new objectives and ran for the closest elevator so that he may get up to the bridge in time. While heading up to the bridge, he activated his helmet's communicator.

'Jessica, send out the Charon frigates. Order them to take up a line formation in front of the Fire of Humanity and the Halcyon-class Cruisers. Deploy the Broadsword fighters immediately!' Captain Sandman ordered firmly and Jessica immediately began executing the order. The magnetic clamps holding the eight UNSC Charon-class Light Frigates were released and the blast doors below them were opening. The Charon-class frigates appeared outside of the UNSC Fire of Humanity's belly with their noses first and immediately flew out to line up at the front of it with their weapons set to maximum charge and shields charged up fully.

The UNSC Fire of Humanity had a new system of launching fighters to battle, which was being integrated into all ships carrying a large complement of fighters. It had a linear induction motor that generated a magnetic field strong enough to launch a space superiority fighter or dropship at large speeds out of a special tube. There were many launch tubes on the sides, next to the massive hangars. Dozens of fighters emerged from them, swiftly assembling in squadrons and taking positions around the small task force.

When the task force was finished lining up and charging their defenses to maximum, a salvo of plasma arrived from the Sangheili rebel ships that were roughly in the same numbers as their UNSC opponents.

The plasma hit each UNSC ship, but the advanced shielding on them allowed the ships to absorb the damage instead of receiving damage. While the rebels were charging up their plasma weapons for another salvo, the UNSC task force released the power of its extremely powerful Magnetic Accelerator Cannons, with the UNSC Fire of Humanity sending a powerful salvo of five MAC shells from its three MAC guns, one of which was of the legendary 'Shredder' type. The Halcyon-class Light Cruisers were fitted with Shredder-type MAC guns as well and they could drain the shields of most ex-Covenant ships with a single salvo.

When the full salvo of the entire UNSC task force was fired, it contained twenty one MAC shells hurling at huge velocities towards their targets and draining their shields quickly, leaving some of the ships vulnerable for a missile barrage. The UNSC ships immediately took that opportunity and fired massive salvos of missiles numbering in the hundreds. These missiles were enough to destroy five of the thirteen Covenant vessels. Suddenly, the Covenant fired another salvo of plasma torpedoes and crippled three UNSC frigate combat capabilities and dealt moderate damage to four more.

'Captain, they're about to turn tail.' Jessica reported to Captain Sandman who was viewing the battle through the bridge's observation port.

'Keep firing the MAC guns.' Captain Sandman ordered and kept viewing the battle. More MAC shells left their barrels and rushed for their targets, disabling six more rebel ships, but the rest, being the Assault Carriers, managed to escape. Luckily, the UNSC Fire of

Humanity had fired a probe with one missile that attached to one of the Assault Carriers. This was a guarantee that they would be lead into their base.

Meanwhile, the Charon-class Light Frigates were recalled back inside the UNSC Fire of Humanity for field repairs to renew the combat capabilities, while the UNSC Fire of Humanity's scanners picked up an IFF from Rala 'Thenam on the planet that they were orbiting.

'Captain!' Jessica shouted immediately as she arranged the holo-table to display a rebel shield dome.

'What is it, Jessica?' John wanted to know why was Jessica shouting all of a sudden. He drove closer to the holo-table with his chair and observed Jessica working on the holograms.

'I've picked up an identify friend/foe beacon that belongs to Rala 'Thenam. It's coming from inside the shield dome, sir.' Jessica reported and immediately illustrated Rala's name on the hologram above the shield dome. 'We need to take the shield dome down, but using our high-yield MAC cannons would have a negative outcome. We need to engage in an atmospheric hover to test out a few ideas that I have developed.' Jessica said as she stared into John's eyes, trying to convince him that she is right.

'Do it, Jessica.' John gave his blessing for Jessica to execute her plans and suddenly, the UNSC Fire of Humanity descended into the atmosphere of the planet. It descended down at a controlled speed of four hundred kilometers per hour that was kept under tight control as the gravity loved to force anything to accelerate when falling.

In a short while, the UNSC Fire of Humanity 'descended from the heavens' as people would say if they would be living in the ancient times. The ship really descended from the thick cloud layer that was covering the surface and pouring rain to the ground. The ship fixed its position ten kilometers from the shield dome and began arming an Onager, the Mark 2488 Mass Accelerator Cannon.

'Captain, arming an Onager, portside.' Jessica reported and quickly rearranged the hologram to display the shield dome and its surrounding territory in a sixteen kilometer radius. The UNSC Fire of Humanity's forward most section was displayed as being nine kilometers and one hundred and thirty two kilometers away from the shield dome, while the further most section was four and a half kilometers further away. A red light appeared on the portside section of the ship where the Onager was being primed. It charged its coils and fired a 15cm dense ferrous shell at the dome shield and Jessica immediately analyzed the result.

'Hmâ€¦ I doubt that our shipboard kinetic weapons will have any effect on it, but there is something in our engineering storeroom that can help. It's a weapon that most prowlers have.' Jessica had the point-defense lasers in mind that all ONI prowlers used. Why the engineers left them in the storeroom of the UNSC Fire of Humanity was a mystery, but at least they might come in handy.

'What weapon are you talking about? I never asked for any extra weapons.' John was confused. Really confused. He didn't understand what Jessica had in mind.

'Captain, a point-defense laser system that we can install as a secondary for a select few of our seventy millimeter point defense guns.' Jessica replied and helped John understand what weapons she meant.

'Ohâ€¦ get on it then. Install them on key areas of the hull.' Captain John gave his blessing yet again and Jessica immediately contacted an engineering crew, ordering them to install the few point-defense lasers that they had.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Mass Effect universe. Exodus Cluster. UNSC Cataclysm, bridge. January 22<strong>\*\*nd\*\*\*\*, 2554, 1133 hours by UTC.

><strong>'Chris, we've arrived at the nearest cluster. We've travelled one hundred and two light years from our new base and arrived at this mass relay. It's connected with the Arcturus Relay. You know, the one that has three fleets of ships guarding it?'' Tanya, the AI of the Cataclysm, explained their location to Commander Chris.

'Damn, we need to slip by undetec-â€¦' Chris wanted to slip past the fleets undetected, but suddenly the Cataclysm's radar picked up a new target just two hundred and fifty meters in size.

'Target detected. Stealth vessel. It's masking its heat signatures, but heading straight for us with weapons armed and ready for combat.' Tanya interrupted him and warned of an incoming threat, when suddenly something similar to a torpedo was fired from the inbound vessel. It seemed to increase in mass, but when the Cataclysm's energy shields were raised, the torpedo was slapped aside and it exploded three kilometers further away from the Supercarrier.

'That did minor damage to our shields, Chris, but that ship is lining up for another attack.' Tanya warned Chris again, this time more serious.

'Damn it, where's John and his ship when we need him. He's got more accurate weapons that can disable engines.' Chris referred to the UNSC Fire of Humanity's Mark 2488 Mass Accelerator Cannons that were meant to engage in broadsides or disable key areas of the hull.

'We can disable their engines with a well-timed ram, Chris. I am already executing it.' Tanya informed and activated the main thrusters of the Cataclysm. The unknown ship fired again and left the firing trajectory, but suddenly, their ship was scratched by the larger Cataclysm as one of their engines was sent flying away in space and another was left barely holding onto the hull as the UNSC Cataclysm rammed the engines. The unknown ship was left drifting in space as its thrust was severely damaged and left incapable of being sustained.

'Well done, Tanya, my dear. Can we contact them now?' Chris said as he observed the unidentified ship carefully through the large observation port at the front of the bridge. It had a somewhat bulbous main hull section and four main thrusters, one of which was left adrift in space. The ship had numerous orange and black lines

running across it and when it turned slightly, Chris could read its name. The ''Normandy'' and it had something similar to a registry number â€" SR-2. Presumably ''Stealth Recon - 2''.

''Yes, I've established a link with them, but I also have successfully deflected one thousand two hundred and ninety one hack attempt right now. All of them failed at their first stages.'' Tanya informed and then activated the communications with the ''Normandy'' that assumed the Cataclysm was an enemy.

''Normandy ship, this is the United Nations Space Command Supercarrier ''Cataclysm''. I am SPARTAN-333, Chris, Commander of this vessel. I demand you explain yourself at once and list your reasons behind this aggression.'' Chris introduced himself and then noticed a male Human pop up on the holo-table next to him.

''My name is Commander Shepard of the Normandy. My AI identified you as a Reaper ship, so we thought that you were going to destroy us. We wanted to take you down first. On behalf of my crew, I am sorry that this happened.'' The Commander of the Normandy replied to Chris' demands. On the holo-table, Shepard was displayed as a male Human in his thirties, with many scars and a tight-fitting black shirt as well as tactical pants and combat boots. He had a clean shaven head and facial stubble.

''What date and time is it?'' Chris asked another question, wanting to know how far in the future of this universe have they arrived.

''It'sâ€| twenty one eight five, twenty second January.'' The Commander of the Normandy replied.

''Five years after we were last sighted in here? Interesting.'' Tanya commented upon hearing that.

''Can we get some repairs? We're stuck in space.'' Commander Shepard asked for help and the UNSC Cataclysm began maneuvers to bring the small ship inside one of its larger hangar bays. It lined its large hangar bay with the nose of the Normandy and a squadron of Pelican dropships flew out, armed with tow cables to tow the Normandy inside. The Normandy was safely placed in the hangar and the Pelicans released their cables, flying away to land back in their places.

A small door on the portside of the Normandy opened up as the Commander of the Normandy himself wanted to step out. The ship's hull was tilted to the side due to the lack of a thruster and the portside part was closer to the ground, meaning a jump won't break any bones. Shepard jumped down and landed safely on the floor as he began observing the massive hangar of the ship that destroyed its thrusters. It was filled with big dropships, tanks, jeeps and small strike fighters and then he turned to notice a platoon-sized unit of infantry approach the ship. They were dressed in metal armor, green colored, and armed with rifles that Shepard never saw before, but seemed to be kinetic weapons. In the middle of the platoon, one person stood out due to his height and extremely bulky armor. The platoon quickly approached the Normandy.

''Commander Shepard? Staff Sergeant Watanabe, UNSC Battlegroup Foxtrot. We've been ordered to secure your ship until further notice from Captain John Sandman, Commanding Officer of Battlegroup Foxtrot.

The order was issued by Commander Chris C-333.'' SSGT Watanabe informed the Commander about an order made by the Commander of the Cataclysm.

''What? Now, don't you think about doing anything to my ship without my permission!'' Commander Shepard was getting quite insistent.

''That's not our decision to make.'' Staff Sergeant Watanabe answered and his Marines began boarding the vessel in a column formation. Marines were immediately posted all around the ship, guarding key areas.

''Whatâ€¦ theâ€¦?'' Shepard was surprised. He thought that these Humans would be friendlier. Shepard wanted to fight, but seeing how menacing they look, he left the idea out. He turned to face Chris C-333 instead.

''Who's Captain Sandman and how soon can he get to us?'' Shepard wanted to know how soon will the Captain arrive.

''Not too soon. He's on a personal quest. Right now, we will return to our little outpostâ€¦ \_after\_ we check your ship for any probes that might divert unwanted attention to us.'' Chris replied and stepped inside the vessel as another Human in bulky armor appeared right next to Shepard. He was keeping an eye over him.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Halo universe, Unidentified star system, unnamed Earth-like planet. January 22<strong>\*\*nd\*\*\*\*, 2554, 1534 hours by UTC.

><strong>''Captain, the new secondary point defenses are installed. I have also taken the liberty of ordering six M808 Main Battle Tanks to be outfitted with experimental high velocity plasma barrels. This is our plan of last resort.'' Jessica informed Captain Sandman who was looking on the shield dome that was displayed on the holo-table.

''Very well. Aim our new weapons at that shield dome and immediately scan for the result.'' John was taking his time to open the shield dome as he knew that no one would be able to escape, should they try to.

Jessica fired the new laser system at the shield dome and noticed that it had a minor effect. These new guns could open a hole and keep it open for a short while.

''Captain, we're bearing fruit! I can open a small hole in the shield dome and keep it open for a short while. Sadly, it's enough to insert one Human in there.'' Jessica said. ''I am ready for our last plan.''

''No, I will take it.'' John said as he put on his Spartan helmet. He was ready to drop down through that hole without a drop pod, just using his armor.

''But Captain, it's quite risky!'' Jessica advised against it.

''I know, but it's the best chance I've got. I don't want to risk any

more time with the tanks.'' John said as he pulled out a data crystal chip from his helmet and placed it closer to Jessica's avatar. ''It's the best chance \_we've\_ got.'' John said.

''Fine.'' Jessica acknowledged and transferred herself into the crystal chip that contained a Riemann cycling-thought Matrix.

''Commander Lowell, take over. Once I give the signal, fire a laser to open a hole in the dome.'' John gave command of the ship over to the Commander.

''Acknowledged, Captain.'' Lowell said with a heavy voice and then coughed heavily.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Ten minutes later, UNSC Fire of Humanity, Deck 15 Broadsword fighter hangar A.<br>\*\*\*''Are you still sure about this, Captain? The fall is quite large and there is no guarantee that you will wake up.'' Jessica said, while viewing the live-link feed from Captain Sandman's helmet camera.

''Well, we Spartans have built in thruster packs in the back of our armor.'' John said as he spread his arms out while standing at the very edge of the hangar. ''Commander, open fire!'' John said and after a short second, he noticed a laser being fired at a point directly below him. John jumped straight down from the ship. The distance between the hangar bay and the ground was two kilometers, easy enough for a Spartan to survive. John quickly fell right through the gap in the shield dome that quickly closed after and he immediately activate his thruster pack to stop his fall. He landed safely on his feet and noticed that there is an entire base hidden behind the shield dome.

''Well, I wasn't expecting this.'' John said as he armed his MA5D Assault Rifle and checked if his Katana and M6C are still in place.

''I am analyzing the location of Rala's IFF, please hide somewhere.'' Jessica advised for John to hide and so he did that, hiding behind the nearest wall. From there, he looked behind the corner and noticed a Sangheili patrol dragging some unarmed Sangheili dressed in simple clothes.

He set that as an optional objective, to rescue the captive Sangheili, but his most important mission was to locate Rala and rescue her. Suddenly, Commander Lowell contacted him.

''Captain, our cruisers in orbit report that the Assault Carriers are back. They're prowling back for a decisive battle. We'll go and help them out, so don't expect any support from us in a while. Fire of Humanity out.'' The Commander informed and John could see the massive vessel fly away back into orbit.

''Guess we're on our own now, Captain.'' Jessica added words to the sight.

''Yeah, have you finished that scan? We're losing time just sitting like this. For all we know, these rebels might be taking Rala to

their executioners.'" John was getting impatient, Jessica agreed with him and fortunately, she had finished her scan.

'I've found her. I am setting a waypoint to her approximate position now. Also, I might suggest that we avoid direct contact with any patrols.'" Jessica advised remaining undetected and John had to obey this advice. He looked up and noticed that the wall that he was hiding behind was actually a barrack, housing many warriors in there, most likely. John also located an alley between barracks, which he took as his stealthy route to Rala, who was, presumably, four hundred meters from him. His route took him straight there, despite his thoughts that it wouldn't, but on the end of the alley, he encountered a Sangheili. Instead of killing it, John decided to slip under one of the barracks, because the barracks were seemingly raised above the ground using supportive struts.

'Captain, motion sensor is picking up a friendly target being dragged. Again, the IFF confirms it as Rala 'Thenam. Perhaps it's time we take action instead of sitting in the shadows?'" Jessica wanted to end this mission faster and John agreed with her.

'Alright, but I need visual confirmation first.'" John said as he slowly crawled closer to the edge of the house under which he was and noticed that it truly was Rala, stripped of her armor and in a torn undersuit. Rala could see his golden visor shine under the house, but she did not raise her hopes up. She thought that it just might be her mind having extremely high hopes.

\_'He'd never come after meâ€| an alien to himâ€| but I can't stop thinking about the time we spent togetherâ€| I shouldn't have left himâ€|'\_ Rala was almost broken at her core since she was tortured a lot, but when she heard gunshots, her near death sadness turned into a gigantic hope, that the love of her life is fighting to free her. She was only fifty meters away from John and decided to take the chance of running to his side. She used her leg to break the knee of one guard and knock another one down. When both were disabled, she immediately ran for John Sandman, who was firing his MA5D Assault Rifle at every Sangheili who put up a fight against him.

'John!'" Rala screamed out of happiness as she arrived by John's side.

'It's great to see you too, Rala.'" John was happy to see Rala alive, although harmed. He stopped firing for a while to use his Katana to cut off the binds holding her arms. When he removed them, he handed her his M6C side-arm.

'John, my gear is in that warehouse!'" Rala pointed at a building right in front of them. She wanted to get her armor back on her, because without it she had no shields at all.

'Alright, stick close to me.'" John informed as he was ready to move. A Sangheili swordsmaster rushed at him, while he was looking at another side, but his motion sensor and the AI Jessica warned him. He pulled his Katana out in time and blocked the energy sword, using the his Katana's Titanium plating that negated the heat. He quickly slashed his sword away and moved himself along with it. Once he stopped at the side of the swordsmaster, he made a lightning fast stab into the Sangheili's gut and cut it open with a fast thrust up.

As his sword left the Sangheili's body, he quickly cut his right arm off and left him to bleed to death as he sheathed his Katana and took his MA5D again. Rala was amazed at John's brutally accurate slashes, but she was happy as well, because she taught him how to properly use a sword. She taught him everything about sword fighting in a year, while he still didn't have his own sword.

'On my signal, you will run towards that warehouse!' John shouted so that Rala can clearly understand the order. She was getting ready to run with whatever strength in her legs that she could muster.

'Go!' John signaled as he saw the Sangheili get pinned down in cover. He quickly reloaded his rifle to keep the Sangheili suppressed, but he could also see more Sangheili rebels coming up.

'Gah!' Rala shouted from the pain as she was shot in her leg by a plasma burst. John immediately left his position to drag her into nearby cover that was provided by one of the barracks next to the warehouse. Now they were surrounded as the Sangheili rebels were everywhere now.

'Damn, I won't rot in captivity. I would rather die than get listed as a prisoner of war.' John was ready to fight 'till the bitter end. He kept responding to the rebel plasma with his hot lead from the MA5D.

'John! I don't want to get back there!' Rala remembered what the Sangheili did to her. They tortured her in many ways – punching, kicking, trying to make her drown, throwing items at her.

'I won't let you.' John replied as he grabbed his Katana in a reverse grip and pulled it out of the sheath. He was getting ready for a close quarter combat fight, when suddenly the UNSC Fire of Humanity reported in.

'Captain, CFV-100 on station.' Commander Lowell informed him and John holstered his MA5D and pulled out a grenade that forms a bubble shield upon deployment. He put his Katana in its sheath as well and offered his hand for Rala. She gladly accepted it and embraced John as he wrapped his hand around her waist.

'Fire everything!' John said and immediately dropped the bubble shield on the ground as it activated and enveloped the Spartan Captain and his Sangheili girlfriend. John even locked his armor in hopes that it would provide additional protection to him and Rala.

When the bubble shield activated, thousands of 70mm shells flew at the shield dome and the dense, ferrous electromagnetic shells of the MAC guns began bombarding the shield dome. The fourth shell destroyed the shield dome entirely and, luckily, the fifth shell was undercharged and caused chaos in a large radius, but luckily John and Rala were protected from the sheer energy release of the shell, although the Sangheili rebels were instantly incinerated by it. The UNSC Fire of Humanity ceased firing its MAC cannons, but it kept firing its 70mm PDGs and sending volleys of missiles at key areas of the base.



The bubble shield finally dropped and John could see four squadrons of D79H-TC Pelicans approaching the base. There were twenty Pelican dropships in each squadron as well as four F-41 Broadwords.

'Captain, we're here to plant a HAVOK nuclear bomb and rescue the innocents. We will arm the enemies of our enemies.' Captain Taylor informed just before his Pelican touched the ground and released Marines along with ODSs and Sangheili.

Some Sangheili came to Captain Sandman's and Rala's side to assist them into getting inside a dropship.

'Do you need help, Shipmaster?' One of the Sangheili Ultras asked upon approaching Captain Sandman. They could clearly see his armor being penetrated in some areas from Type-51 Carbines. There were many holes in his armor, especially in the chest area and once John removed his helmet, he seemed to be bleeding out as blood was coming out of his mouth, slowly.

'No, thanks, Ultra, but you can find Rala's gear in this warehouse and bring it back on the ship.' John replied and gave Rala his helmet. She held it firmly while John slowly picked her up, sliding one hand under her legs and the other behind her back. He carried her all the way to the nearest Pelican and, when inside, he placed her on the closest seat and sat down right next to her. The Pelican was getting ready to take off, but before it could, three Elite Ultras jumped in it with Rala's armor and weapons.

'Pilot, get us back on the ship.' John wanted to get back 'home' as soon as he could. Rala couldn't agree more as she wanted to leave that accursed place in which she suffered.

'Well, that went better than expected, didn't it?' Jessica commented and slightly laughed.

'Shut up, Jessica.' John didn't want to hear any jokes.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>One hour later, UNSC Fire of Humanity's Deck 143 medical bay. 1701 hours by UTC.<br>Rala and John were both lying in the med bay, in on bed, while a doctor was examining them. The doctor noted Captain Sandman's extreme sturdiness as many would've died, had they taken such extensive physical damage. Luckily, Captain Sandman was a SPARTAN-IV and his augmentations actually saved his life, for they gave him increased durability, among other things. He also noticed the many wounds and rashes on Rala's body and wanted to perform an extensive dermal regeneration surgery to help her recover at an increased pace.

'Ma'am, I strongly suggest dermal regeneration if you want to lose your injuries and the emotional trauma associated with them.' The doctor approached Rala while she was pondering, but suddenly she growled at him.

'Back off!' She growled again.

'But, ma'am, this is for your own good!' The doctor kept trying to get Rala accept this option.

'Doc, leave her be. If she will want to perform it, she will take it, but leave her be!' The Captain shouted on the doctor, who finally agreed to leave her alone as he raised his hands in a fake surrender and stepped back.

'Alright, I am sorry. Captain, you have suffered exposure to the Type-51 Carbine's radiation, but, fortunately for you, the radiation disappeared soon after without doing any damage to your body or any organs.

'That's great news, but could you please leave us be?' Captain Sandman wanted some private time with Rala in his personal room in the med bay.

'Very well, I will leave you two now.' The doctor said and left the ward with the doors sealing behind him.

'What did they do to you in there, Rala?' John wanted to know what really did the Sangheili rebels do to his beloved girlfriend.

'Theyâ€¦ they abused meâ€¦' She replied as the Sangheili actually tried raping her. 'Were it not for one of their more honorable warriorsâ€¦ I would never have been able to talkâ€¦' Rala said as a tear fell down her eye and she placed her on John's chest and began to cry. 'That warrior who saved me was my long lost brother, John! He died for meâ€¦ but the rebels still had their way with me, showing their domination by punching and kickingâ€¦ the one you cut apart was one of themâ€¦' Rala couldn't control her emotions and John wrapped his hands around her to comfort her, to let her know that she is not there anymore, but that she is in his strong hands.

'Don't worry, Ralaâ€¦ you're not there anymoreâ€¦ history will not repeat these two awful days for us both anymore. I can bet my life on it.' John felt bad for Rala.

'I know it's my fault for wandering off without youâ€¦' Rala said and then she remembered some chatter between the guards. She wiped away her tears to look into John's hazel colored eyes.

'John, they did it to get to you. They knew they would find you, so they attempted to kidnap me to break you, but they didn't expect such retaliation.' Rala said, with tears still flowing out of her eyes. John gently wiped them away from her eyes.

'I could've brought the entire battlegroup down on their heads.' John said and looked through the window where the planet was. He was waiting to see the HAVOK nuclear weapon to destroy the base entirely. The nuke went off just in time as it vaporized everything in a radius of eight kilometers in just a few seconds.

'Vengeance.' John commented on the sight of pure annihilation.

'All hands, prepare for a slipspace jump. We're jumping to the slipspace gate.' Jessica, the AI, informed everyone onboard the UNSC Fire of Humanity as the ship and its two escorting cruisers immediately began a slip to the slipspace gateway.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Meanwhile, in the Mass Effect universe, January 22nd, 2554, 1833 hours by UTC.<br>\*\*The UNSC Cataclysm arrived at the new base of operations for the UNSC in this universe. The UNSC managed to assemble a base an an orbital infrastructure in a very short time, as well as opened traffic between the two universes. It took mere hours for the UNSC to do it as ships of the Sixteenth Fleet were already sitting over the planet that was called ''Caprica''.

The Cataclysm immediately arrived next to a shipyard and the Pelican dropships towed the Normandy SR-2 out of the Cataclysm's hangar, where UNSC EVA Engineers began mounting the missing thruster back, as it was delivered by the Cataclysm back as well.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Don't judge me for using a planet's name from ''Battlestar Galactica''. I love that show, but I love Halo more. I really had no idea of what name to give to a planet, so I just named it after a planet in my favorite TV show.<br>Anyways, I hope you liked it. Remember to leave a review with your thoughts, ideas etc. Remember to follow/favorite if you like the story and remember to suggest it to your friends that might like it.<br>>Your support in ANY way is always appreciated.<strong>

## 6. New Enemies

\*\*Heyo readers, bringing another chapter in ''Reclaimers''. Hope you enjoy it. But before you begin reading, I would really like to read your opinion:

>''Should the UNSC Fire of Humanity be replaced by an Infinity-class Warship? No, not the Infinity variant, just the same class but NOT the same Forerunner gear. So, should it or should it not?''<br>Your opinion is always much appreciated.<br>><strong>

\* \* \*

><p><strong>January 23rd, 2554, 0354 hours by UTC. The Halo Universe, 10 light years away from Sol's Oort Cloud's slipspace gateway. UNSC Fire of Humanity.<br>\*\*The bridge was in a usual rhythm of peace during the night time aboard the UNSC Fire of Humanity as only two officers were doing their jobs in it. One was responsible for navigations and the other was responsible for communications. Even though they were on their night shift, the AI â€" Jessica â€" was doing everything because the two had fallen asleep. Jessica's hologram popped up over a holo-tank next to the holo-table.

''Analyzingâ€| it seems that these two have strained themselves. They haven't slept for three days.'' Jessica analyzed the two night shift officers and sighed. ''I won't disturb them.'' She said to herself and disappeared from the holo-tank.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Meanwhile in the Captain's medical room.<br>\*\*John had woken up, silently, and left the bed that he shared with Rala in the

medical room. He was looking outside a shielded window into slipspace and its cold blackness. Suddenly, he heard a rather loud sigh coming from behind him and felt two hands touch his uncovered shoulders. He knew that it was Rala, because only she touched him that lovingly.

'Why aren't you sleeping?' She asked while walking to John's side.

'Sorry, I've been thinking about what you said yesterday. The Servants wanted to break meâ€| why? What would they gain out of that?' John pondered on Rala's words.

'Well, that could mean that Humanity would lose an expert tactician and a powerful Spartan.' Rala joined in and tried to answer John's questions from a Covenant point of view, the point that she was taught for years. 'The more Humanity loses, the easier it is for the Covenant to finish what they started.'

'Trueâ€| but, why abduct someone? It was easier to amass a fleet and loyalists, and then to launch an overwhelming tactical strike.' John asked again, still looking out into slipspace.

'Yes, I am wondering about that too.' Rala couldn't answer that one as she began thinking along with John.

'Something more is present in there, but I can't really understand whatâ€| I think time might tell.' John said as he turned to face Rala. He leaned closer and gave her a kiss, before going back to the bed. Rala quickly joined him back and the two covered themselves with the blanket that they shared and gave each other a good night kiss, before going back to sleep.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Seven hours later.<br>\*\*\*'Captain, please wake up.' A familiar voice was trying to wake John up. He slowly opened his eyes and noticed that Captain Scarecrow was disturbing his sleep.

'Gah! Taylor, what the fuck?' John spoke loudly and noticed that Rala was hiding under the blanket to hide her nudity from the Marine Captain.

'Sorry, Captain, but we've went past the gate already. We've rallied up with the Cataclysm and the rest of the battlegroup plus another fleet andâ€|'' Captain Scarecrow was thinking of how to tell the bad news delicately. 'â€| and Commander Lowell diedâ€| from burned lungs.' Captain Scarecrow explained the bad news.

'Howâ€|? What happened?' John couldn't understand what happened with his most trusted executive officer.

'During the raid on our ship, he took two direct shots to his chest. That burned his lungs and began killing him. He refused to take any medication, because he thought that everything will pass, and so, two hours ago he couldn't inhale anymore oxygen and died from that.' Scarecrow explained everything about Commander Lowell's death.

'Damnâ€|'' John finally understood what happened, but he was

saddened by Lowell's death.

'Sir, we're planning on launching him out of a launch tube in a few minutes. If you're feeling well, maybe you and Rala can join us and give a speech? It will be recorded and sent to the Lowell family.' Captain Scarecrow offered an option that Captain Sandman could not turn down.

'I'll be there.' John said and Scarecrow turned to leave out through the doors, but stopped to inform in which hangar will it take place.

'Sir, it's going to take place in the fifteenth deck's A hangar.' Scarecrow said and left, leaving John and Rala alone so that they might get dressed appropriately. Well, so that John could put on his officer's clothes, while Rala put on her Sangheili Special Operations combat harness.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Deck 15 Hangar A, January 23<strong>\*\*\*rd\*\*\*\*, 2554, 1119 hours by UTC.

><strong>Captain Sandman and Rala 'Thenam had arrived at the hangar and noticed that quite a lot of Navy and Marine Corps officers and servicemen had gathered in the hangar to honor Commander Charles Lowell.

'â€| and so, that's why I believe Charles Lowell was a fine executive officer and a friend.' Captain William 'Scarecrow' Taylor was finishing his speech. He noticed Rala and Captain John, so he immediately invited them to the sarcophagus of Commander Lowell that will be launched back through the slipspace portal into their universe. 'I would like to ask Captain John Sandman and his girlfriend, Rala 'Thenam, over here so that they may provide a speech.' Scarecrow invited the two over and John had to comply.

Slowly, John came in front of the hundreds of Marines and Naval crewmen where he began developing a speech.

'Commander Charles Lowell, XO of the Fire of Humanity. Personally, I've known this man for two yearsâ€| sure as hell feels like more, butâ€| he's been a damn great person. He's helped out everyone in tough situations, and he has supported those that he cared about. He was never hiding his true self, Commander Lowell was a rather open person and was friendly to all. His death is a great loss not just for the UNSC and the UEG, but for the entire Orion Arm, if not the Milky Way Galaxy. Truly, if Commander Lowell would've wanted to be a ship Captain, I would've given him command over one of my Cruisers without hesitation and that wasn't because I wanted to get rid of him. No. I never wanted that. It was because he deserved to command his own ship, but I guess his moment never cameâ€|' John hung his head as he observed the sarcophagus. 'Commander Charles Lowell's belief in the UNSC never faltered and he died loyal to Earthâ€| wherever he is right now, may he rest in peace.' John finished his speech and stepped aside where Rala was waiting for him.

'Interesting speech.' Rala commented as he observed the sarcophagus of the Commander.

'I never was one for speeches, but yeah, I think it turned out pretty well.' John replied and noticed that the sarcophagus was being lifted by six Marines and placed inside the tube, directly on the electromagnetic catapult. As soon as it was placed on the catapult, the Marines left the tube and slowly, but steady, it closed. It was being prepared for a launch as the electromagnetic launch system began charging up.

Everyone stood at attention and saluted to the launch of their executive officer. His sarcophagus was soon launched from the UNSC Fire of Humanity and straight through the slipspace gateway. Luckily, the sarcophagus had a thin lead layer that was protecting it from slipspace radiation that could completely destroy one's body, so short-term slipspace travel was safe.

In a few seconds, the sarcophagus was out of visual and sensor range as it was travelling back to UNSC territory through the inter-universal slipspace gate.

'I'll have trouble replacing him' John sighed as he realized that he will miss him a lot. He decided to visit the cryo-bay that was on the same level. That's where Commander Charles Lowell's cryo-pod was at.

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><p><strong>Cryo-bay 3, UNSC Fire of Humanity, Deck 15, 1132 hours by UTC.<strong>

>Captain Sandman entered the cryo-bay which had about a hundred cryo-pods in it. Most of them in were standby mode, waiting for their occupants. The cryo-bay itself was quite freezing, but not cold enough for anyone to wear winter clothes. John stepped a few meters forward where he saw Commander Lowell's pod on his right. He turned to face it.<p>

'Rest in peace, Commander.' John silently whispered to himself and pressed a button to close the pod. The doors slid shut from the top to the bottom.

John didn't notice that Rala was silently observing his grief over the loss of the ship's executive officer. She was simply leaning against a wall and looking at him with her head slightly tilted downwards.

'John, maybe you need a vacation?' Rala suggested, disturbing John. The Captain slowly approached her and took her hands, but keeping them down.

'I would agree, but' John gazed into Rala's eyes and then sighed. 'there is no XO to watch over the ship while I' John immediately began correcting himself. He wanted to spend a vacation with Rala. 'I mean while we are on a vacation.' Rala was overjoyed at the possibility to spend some time entirely alone with John, away from the ship, away from all its noises.

'Well, Jessica can handle it, can't she?' Rala thought that Human-made 'Smart' AI's are capable of anything and Jessica's hologram popped up from a nearby holo-tank.

'Well, I can keep the ship in orbit around the planet that you two want to spend some time alone on.' Jessica answered as she pretty much understood what needed to be done when commanding a ship.

'Alright, Rala. We're going to head down toâ€¦' John was trying to remember the name of the planet that the UNSC established an outpost on.

'Caprica, Captain. Caprica has a coastline that would make any life form feel relaxed. At least, that's what official UNSC Navy descriptions say.' Jessica remarked with a little bit of humor, not knowing what the planet actually has.

'Well then, Rala, let's pack our stuff and head on down for a vacation.' John smiled while still looking into Rala's eyes, the two sharing a silent moment together and then hugging.

'I love you.' Rala wanted to spend some time alone with John for quite a while already, but this was her first real chance to do so.

'I love you too, dear.' John shared her needs to spend some time alone. Finally, John and Rala went back to their cabin which was a few decks below to pack their most necessary items like a toothbrush, communicator and other things.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Two hours later, Deck 134 Pelican hangar bay, 1345 hours by UTC.<br>A single D79H-TC Pelican dropship had been prepared for a trip down to the surface. John and Rala had put two of their bags inside and taken the seats with John being the pilot and Rala sitting the troop bay. The Pelican's back doors sealed shut and it immediately took off, using its four hull mounted vertical thrust engines. John then quickly turned the four main wings to have their thrusters face to the back, thus propelling the Pelican forward. The Pelican left the hangar bay and proceeded to head to the surface of Caprica.

'I'm really excited about this, John. Spending time on the beach, being irresponsible and other things like that.' Rala commented about her thoughts on the vacation.

'I think so as well.' John supported her comment with his own. Still, he was quite focused on piloting the dropship, but his skill in piloting managed to get them down to the surface rather quickly. Down to the surface next to their vacation home that was rather big, but not too big. And it was built right next to the beach.

The Pelican quickly landed and opened its doors. John stepped out first to offer his hand to Rala, showing his more gentleman side. After Rala was off, he quickly took the bags off of her and the two proceeded to their vacation home.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Meanwhile, UNSC Cataclysm's bridge. January 23<strong>rd\*\*\*\*, 2554, 1359 hours by UTC.<br><strong>Commander Shepard had entered the bridge of the UNSC

Cataclysm along with a few of his friends and a UNSC Marine fireteam keeping an eye on them. Among Shepard's friends was a Turian, a Human suffering from brittle bone disease and a Salarian doctor. Shepard's entire crew on the Normandy was arrested when Tanya, the AI, confirmed them as members of a criminal organization known as 'Cerberus'. She confirmed it by hacking the database of the Normandy, breaching the firewalls that the Normandy's AI had set up. Only Shepard and his alien friends were brought aboard the Cataclysm.

'Impressive. War architecture. Never before seen type. Must be very efficient.' The Salarian commented on what he saw in the bridge.

'Welcome aboard the United Nations Space Command Supercarrier 'Cataclysm'. This is the bridge where all the decisions are made, this is the brain and heart of the vessel.' Commander Chris C-333 introduced Shepard and his team to the bridge of the Cataclysm.

'Why are you keeping us here?' The Turian spoke, asking a question to which the rest of the team wanted to know the answer.

'Because you attacked a UNSC vessel without provocation. Your ship will be impounded until further notice and any rebellion that you might attempt to start will be met with extreme force, should the Captain allow that.' Chris answered, intimidating the team, forcing them to forget any thoughts of rebellion. Shepard felt like fighting, but something told him that the twenty Marines, the bridge guards, around him armed with assault rifles and the two officers in heavy armor would put him and his team down in mere seconds if he was to attempt a rebellion.

'Fine, but we're wasting time just staying here. The Collectors are abducting Humans in the Terminus systems. Hundreds of thousands are missing and millions more will be lost if we do not act now!' Commander Shepard tried reasoning with Commander Chris.

'I would like some proof with those words. We can't trust everyone we meet, Commander.' Commander Chris said, crossing his arms across his chest.

'Yes. Proof. Here, a recording.' The Salarian activated an orange tool around his forearm and activated a video.

'Put your tool on the table.' Tanya, the AI of the warship, chimed in and the Salarian immediately became curious.

'Hm an AI unshackled? Very interesting. You are taking a great risk.' The Salarian commented and wanted to comment further, but then Chris held his hand in a 'stop' position.

'No, we're not taking a risk by limiting our AI functions.' Commander Chris responded to the Salarian's warning. 'I don't know about your AI's, but ours aren't that stupid to go for a rebellion. Each of our AI's can be put down easily, if one knows the correct things to do.' Chris was talking about the override passcode that is used on a rampant AI to deactivate it. 'Enough of this anti-AI talk. Just do as she says and put your hand on the holo-table.' Chris



wanted to continue as fast as possible.

The Salarian put his hand on the table and Tanya immediately copied the video data plus a little extra from it and saved it in the UNSC Cataclysm's memory drives. Upon analyzing the video, she immediately played it from the holo-table, simulating a 3D environment instead of the limited one in a simple video.

In the video, an entire colony was shown being abducted by aliens that the inhabitants of this universe call ''Collectors''. The Collectors were loading the Humans in pods and taking them away.

''Damn.'' John B-201 commented on the sight and it was not a pleasant one.

''Who were these things again?'' Chris asked the Salarian, but Shepard was the first one to answer.

''We call them Collectors. They ''collect'' live Human beings from unprotected colonies.'' Shepard explained.

''Mhm.'' Chris slightly nodded his head. He understood what Shepard said, but he didn't really understand why Humans were being abducted.

''Will you help us get to the bottom of this? We know you took most of our crewmembers and placed them in jail because they were affiliated with a known terrorist organization, so we need YOUR help now.'' Shepard wanted to gain some new and powerful allies to the cause. Chris immediately contacted Captain Sandman who was lying on a beach.

''Captain?'' Chris contacted the Captain, but heard only laughter from a Human and a Sangheili female. It took a short while for the Captain to realize that he was being contacted on his ear communicator.

''Ohâ€¦| didn't notice you there, Commander. What is it that you require?'' John spoke, finally.

''Uhâ€¦| yeahâ€¦| well, we need your permission to go and investigate something that's been troubling our captives. It's on the other side of the Galaxy, Captain.'' Chris hoped to be allowed to go investigate, but expected a denial.

''Go and investigate, just make sure you don't bring unnecessary attention this way.'' By the Captain's words, Chris understood that he wanted to keep their outpost a top secret.

''I'll make triple sure that we arrive alone.'' Chris said and ended the call, turning to face Tanya, but speaking to Shepard's team.

''Where were they last seen, Shepard?'' Chris was ready to investigate.

''They were last seen in Freedom's Progress.'' Shepard approached the holo-table and placed his hand on the table, activating his tool so that the data on the planet and its parent star would be sent into

the memory drives of the vessel they were on.

'We're going to head there now. Tanya, plot a course and spin up the slipspace drive. Maximum FTL speed. Go even faster if possible, but we cannot use the relays.' Chris gave the order to Tanya and looked out the window of the bridge where he saw a slipspace gateway open up. The UNSC Cataclysm quickly entered it, before it closed entirely. The ship was now heading towards the Freedom's Progress colony that was in the lawless part of the Galaxy.

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><p><strong>Caprica, Southern Hemisphere, January 23<strong>\*\*\*rd\*\*\*\*, 2554, 1452 hours by UTC.

><strong>John and Rala were enjoying their time on the beach, sitting together on the sand and looking at the waves. It was a rather sunny day on the beach in one of the southern islands with a temperature just above 26 degrees per Celsius. There was a small concentration of clouds, but it wasn't enough to disturb the sun's light from reaching the surface of the planet.

The two were having a rather quiet moment, when Rala finally wanted to know a bit more about John's past.

'Hey, what made you join the ranks of this UNSC?' Rala asked a question that John kept asking himself a lot when he was younger.

'Wellâ€¦ to be honest, I don't remember everything precisely, butâ€¦ there was a friend of the family who, fortunately for me, was also a sports teacher in my school back on Mars. He had told me what he heard about my family and it made me think about joining the Army, at least. I didn't plan to be recruited into the Marine Corps though. He told me those stories when I was just ten years old. Six years later, a UNSC fireteam comes by and recruits me into the Marine Corps.' John summed everything up pretty well, because Rala could easily understand that part of John's life.

'What about you? What made you join the Covenant Army?' John asked, not knowing how Rala joined the military herself.

'Well, you don't know about everyday life for Sangheili. Only men are joining the ranks while women are left behind in the houses. We receive some training in self-defense too, but when a woman tries to join the ranks, she immediately loses all respect and sometimes things go as far as sexism. It's not like a paradise for Humans where both genders are equal.' Rala remembered the day when she tried to enlist. 'It was awful for me too. When I approached the nearest Ultra, he said that I will be useless on the field. I tried arguing, to no avail, so I resorted to violence to prove that I am wrong. I barely beat him, but I still managed to beat him.'

'Sounds like one hell of a day just trying to advance in your life.' John imagined the sight of an Elite Ultra being beaten down by an untrained Elite female. The most useful move in there should've been a kick to the jewels. No matter how strong one's shields are, the balls always are the weak spot and Sangheili males seemed to forget about any plated pelvis protection.

'Yeahâ€¦ I know that you were trying to imagine the sight. Yes, I

had to deliver a hard kick to the balls.'' Rala caught John, because he was staring in the ocean without actually looking anywhere else. A common thing for those who are trying to imagine or are imagining.

''What happened after you gave a beat down to the Ultra?'' John asked, wanting to know more of the story.

''Well, two Zealots approached, saying that they had seen me beat down the Ultra. They commented on my resolve to join the Army. They, of course, still didn't show any belief that I could be anything more than front line meat, but they sent me immediately to a special area on Sanghelios. There, I undertook training along with one hundred other Sangheili. All of them males. Often we were placed in groups to spar with each other and often I would show my skill. The leader of our group immediately recognized my skill and sent me to the Special Operations training unit. A few months later, I hear that I am assigned to a ship that is part of Regret's personal escort and when we drop out of slipspace, we find ourselves massively outgunned. That's when I met you for the first time.'' Rala finished her story. John simply smirked.

''That easy? I mean, in the Marine Corps, me and my previous girlfriend had to prove ourselves on the field that we are good enough for the Helljumpers. After a single mission, we were recruited in the Marine Corps Special Operations but youâ€¦ you just have to show off in basic training and you get slapped with the special armor and sent into dangerous missions? I envy you.'' John smiled as he looked in Rala's eyes.

''Yes, well, the most promising warriors are given the deadliest jobs. The same is in the Human military.'' Rala explained and then lied down on the sand.

''Yeah, I think so too.'' John agreed with her assumption and lied down on the sand with Rala. At least he thought Rala made an assumption.

''I wonder what's going on back home.'' John began pondering on the situation back at the Sol System and even thought about the Urs-Fied-Joori system â€" Rala's home system.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Freedom's Progress, January 24th, 2554 (By UNSC Calendar), 0131 hours by UTC.<br>\*\*Chris C-333, John B-201, Commander Shepard, his Turian friend â€" Garrus Vakarian - and his Salarian ally â€" Mordin Solus â€" had arrived on Freedom's Progress on a Dropship 79 Heavy â€" Troop Carrier. A D79H-TC Pelican. Along with them were four UNSC Marines clad in their traditional green armor and armed with MA5D Assault Rifles.

''Marines, keep our ride secure.'' Chris gave an order and readied his Boltshot pistol in case some of these ''Collectors'' appear.

''Truly, this place creeps me out.'' One of the Marines was chatting with the rest of his fireteam while the Spartans and their new friends went deeper into the colony.

'See? Empty. The last time we were here a bunch of mechs attacked us and we met up with Tali'Zorah. A former member of my crew.' Shepard tried to convince Chris that the Collector threat is real and that they need the UNSC's assistance, but when he mentioned Tali, Chris stopped listening to anything else.

'Where's Tali right now?' Chris wanted to know her exact location.

'What's it to you? Why would you want to find someone you don't know?' Garrus Vakarian spoke, wanting to know Chris's reasons.

'What does it matter for you? Where is she?' Chris was restless in trying to force the answer out verbally. He had a plan in case verbal communication doesn't work. His plan involved quite a bit of punching and screaming.

'She's back with the quarians in the Migrant Fleet.' Shepard answered. 'We offered her the chance to join our crew but she turned down the offer to return to the Migrant Fleet. To her people.'

Chris immediately wanted to get to this 'Migrant Fleet' and try to get Tali back into his crew, but he knew that he had to take it a bit slower. He was still under the direct command of Captain John Sandman and he could only go to the Migrant Fleet if Captain Sandman gives his clearance or allows him to roam freely around the Galaxy until further orders. Chris also had to file an after-investigation report about the colony along with Shepard.

'Rightâ€¦ I've seen enough of this colony in this short time. Back to the dropship and back to Caprica.' Chris said and the team turned back to return to the UNSC Cataclysm.

While en-route, Mordin Solus seemed to be working on the video, analyzing the Collectors. Chris and John B-201 both saw that, but did not want to disturb him.

'Tanya, once we're back aboard the Cataclysm, make an immediate jump back to Caprica.' Chris wanted to get back and ask for clearance faster.

'Alright. Just hurry up, I am picking up some signals on long-range scanners.' Tanya was reading three unidentified targets outside of the system and wanted to speed up Chris's return to the ship.

'Acknowledged. Everyone, double time it! Back into the dropship!' Chris shouted and everyone began running back and jumping inside the Pelican dropship which, after the last person â€” John B-201 â€” jumped in it immediately took off back to the UNSC Cataclysm. In a few minutes the dropship landed in a hangar bay, allowing the UNSC Cataclysm to make the slip back to Caprica unnoticed.

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><p><strong>Caprica, January 24<strong>\*\*th\*\*\*\*, 2554, 0637 hours by UTC.

><strong>It was a beautiful morning on Caprica, with the sun shining

from the East and the nearby sea sparkling blue. Captain Sandman had woken up after sleeping on the warm sands and noticed that Rala was sleeping inside the D79H-TC Pelican dropship. He could clearly see her, because the main doors of the Pelican were aimed at him and they were open.

He slowly and silently approached her in hopes of waking her up with a morning tickle, but it seemed that she was already awake as when John got close, she quickly scared him by raising her hands up to his face.

'Gah!' John jumped back a little and Rala began laughing.

'The great Captain Sandman scared by two four fingered hangs!' Rala laughed and John found the thought amusing as well.

'Laugh it up.' John said while smiling himself.

'Oh you should've seen your face.' Rala kept laughing, but then John came up with something not as clever, but rather foolish.

'Rala, let's have kids.' John tried to maintain a normal face without any emotions and Rala stopped laughing, slowly bringing her head up and looking at John who was standing in front of her with his arms crossed, in his officer's uniform.

'W-what? Hâ€| how can we have them? Aren't we genetically incompatible?' Rala began questioning the idea behind the sentence and noticed that John was starting to shake slowly. He was silently laughing.

'Ha-ha!' John finally let his burst of laughter out as he laughed. He had confused Rala.

'Oh youâ€|' Rala said softly to him when she finally realized that it was a joke.

'Yeah, that sounds about right. Now come on, get ready to return to the ship. Our vacation's done. We can't spend more than a day on this place, even if we want to. Besides, we both need to heal some of our wounds too. Especially you. You need that dermal regeneration operation.' Captain Sandman went to the pilot's seat where he sat down and activated the Pelican's vertical thrusters and the nacelle thrusters, warming them up for a take-off and flight outside the planet. After some time, the dropship finally took off and after two minutes it finally left the atmosphere of Caprica, getting closer and closer to the UNSC Fire of Humanity until it finally reached the vessel and entered its largest hangar.

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><p><strong>Thank you for reading and please, remember that I would like to see your opinions on the question asked at the very beginning <strong>\*\*(Not forcing you to tell them. You could always vote on the poll, if you want to answer but without doing it directly)\*\*\*\*. Again, thank you for reading and have a nice day.\*\*

**\*\*Hey all, bringing you another chapter. Hope you enjoy this, so... I will keep this part short... dive in.**

**\* \* \***

Caprica's orbit, UNSC Fire of Humanity's bridge, January 26th, 1111 hours by UTC. 2554 (UNSC Calendar)  
**'''Captain, I would like to ask for clearance to head out to the Migrant Fleet and get Tali'Zorah back into the team.''** Chris began arguing with Captain John.

**''Permission denied. We cannot jeopardize our position, Commander. Do you even know how large is the Migrant Fleet and what are its full capabilities? For all we know, they can attach a probe on your ship and track you all the way back here while our Super MAC defenses are just being assembled.''** John didn't want to risk attracting unnecessary attention while the orbital defense grid was being built. He took a datapad and observed the data, seeing that twenty Super MAC cannons are being assembled in orbit and that they will be finished only a month later.

**''But, Captain, an old crewmember of mine is there. You know her too. I want to get her back aboard the Cataclysm.''** Commander Chris kept pushing for a permission.

**''I said no, Chris. Until we know what they can do, we cannot risk sending any of our ships their way. What if they'll blast your ship to bits and pieces if you go there? What then? Will you get your team member back onboard?''** Captain John raised a valid point. No one knew anything about the Migrant Fleet. No one in the UNSC, to be more precise. Suddenly, Commander Shepard appeared just outside the bridge and asked for permission to step inside.

**''Captain, my name's Commander Shepard. Permission to come inside the bridge?''** Commander Shepard introduced himself, standing in discipline with his hands behind his back.

**''Granted. Welcome aboard the flagship of Battlegroup Foxtrot.''** Captain John allowed Shepard to get inside his large, roomy bridge in which at least a dozen UNSC officers were in. Captain John then turned back to Chris, waiting for an answer from him.

**''Butâ€¦ what if we do a little recon?''** Chris was anxious to get Tali'Zorah back aboard the Cataclysm.

**''What? You want me to order a Prowler from Earth for stealth reconnaissance? Do you know how much the stealth system costs? It's not standard equipment yet.''** John did agree that to find out everything about the capabilities of the Migrant Fleet, a Prowler had to be sent in. Still, John was very cautious when it came down to risk the lives of naval personnel for one person that an officer thought to be valuable for him.

**''Perhaps the Normandy can be of some assistance?''** Shepard offered the services of the Normandy SR-2, but Chris immediately rejected that option, because he saw firsthand the full stealth capabilities of the Normandy and he was most definitely not impressed.

'Not an option. Your ship's stealth capabilities are useless. No offence.'

'What do you mean?' John raised an eyebrow when Chris rejected the offer.

'Well, their stealth system is inferior to ours. They only hide their heat signatures, while ours hides the ship visually and hides any signals from it.' Chris explained, staring in John's hazel eyes and Shepard felt slightly offended from that.

'Fine, Chris, you'll get your Prowler, but take a small crew with you.' John was convinced. He looked at the AI "Jessica" and nodded for her. It was a sign to send a request to Earth. Chris, glad of the choice Captain Sandman made, retreated out of the bridge to head back into his Pelican and return to the Cataclysm. Once Chris left, Shepard approached Captain Sandman.

'Captain, what's he planning?' Shepard wished to know, still standing straight with his arms behind his back.

'Recruiting Tali'Zorah into his team.' John said while activating a combat video. In the video, the UNSC Fire of Humanity, eight Charon-class Light Frigates and two Halcyon-class Light Cruisers were fighting a flotilla of rebellious Sangheili ships. It was the battle in which John rescued Rala. John wanted to learn their tactics better.

'I may be of help. I know her well, and I could help your Commander to recruit her into the team.' Shepard offered his services, but suddenly a message arrived from UNSC Military Headquarters on Earth.

'Captain Sandman, several Storm Sangheili ships have been detected flying around the Epsilon Eridani system. I want your ship to head there immediately and investigate them.' It was Fleet Admiral Lord Hood contacting him. Captain Sandman had to comply.

'Negative, Shepard. I might need your assistance with this one. Navigation, take the ship through the slipspace gate and then take us straight for Reach.' John gave an order, while closing the simulated holographic video. 'Tactical Condition Alpha Three.'

'Roger that, Captain.' The Chief Navigations Officer complied with the order and immediately ordered the helmsmen to pilot the ship through.

'Jessica, you're in charge of the bridge while I am gone.' Captain Sandman said, looking slightly angered from hearing about the rebellious Sangheili. He immediately left the bridge and went for his personal cabin, but the Chief Engineer of the vessel ran to him with important information.

'Captain, we've got a problem with the hull. It's cracking in several areas.' The Chief Engineer looked very serious and John immediately looked confused.

'What?' John asked, still looking rather confused and shocked.

'Yes, Sir. Phoenix-class ships weren't designed for battle so lightweight, cheap and less protective materials were used in their construction. The outer Titanium battleplating won't hold the ship together. I give an estimate of a few months until the ship begins collapsing on itself.' The Chief Engineer informed and John put his hand on a nearby wall of the ship, feeling sad that she's beginning to die on him.

'If we go to battle again, she'll crumble faster?' John had a serious emotional attachment to his ship. To the one he lived on for two years now.

'Yes, Captain. If we take moderate to serious damage, I might give an estimate of a few weeks at best.' The Chief Engineer informed, looking sad himself that the ship's hull is failing.

'Thank you for the news, Chief.' John thanked the Engineer and went further on to his room. His room wasn't too far and when he entered it, he immediately sat down on a chair and grabbed his own head with his hands. He was really sad that the ship's life was limited.

'What's going on, John?' Rala spoke, as she was still lying in bed. John turned around in his chair to face her as he took his hands off of his head.

'She's crumbling, Rala. The ship is dying.' John's emotional attachment to the ship made him really sad and his voice shaky.

'I'mâ€¦ I'm so sorry, John.' Rala got out of bed and came by John's side, sitting down on his lap.

'Yeahâ€¦'

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Two hours later. Epsilon Eridani System. January 26<strong>\*\*\*th\*\*\*\*, 1342 hours by UTC, 2554.

><strong>The UNSC Fire of Humanity emerged out of slipspace just over the former UNSC fortress world, glassed. Many of the crew went to their closest observation ports to see the glassed world of Reach. The planet's dominant color was bright orange instead of its natural blue and green. It was because the planet was a wasteland after its fall.

'Situation report, please.' Captain Sandman asked for a report as soon as he entered the bridge of the warship, clad in MJOLNIR GEN2 Recruit armor.

'We're in standard orbit over Reach and I am definitely detected at least a dozen signals behindâ€¦ Reach. On the other side of the orbit.' Jessica immediately raised the tactical condition to Alpha-2. That meant that the UNSC Fire of Humanity and the eight Charon-class Light Frigates it carries were charging up its weapons and preparing for contact. Suddenly, two dozen of warships came out from the other side of the planet. Four dozen CCS-class Battlecruisers and two CAS-class Assault Carriers. With these odds, the UNSC Fire of Humanity was completely outmatched.



'Jessica, send word to Earth that we're outnumbered and need immediate assistance. Send the exact number of enemy forces.'

Captain John sat down on his chair and immediately began combat commanding. 'Fire all MAC cannons on the Assault Carrier. Send all shield power to the front, ready the nukes, prepare the missiles and activate the Fortress defense system. Send out all Broadsword fighters.'

Moments later, the UNSC Fire of Humanity began sending swarms of seventy millimeter shells and hundreds of missiles on the rebellious Sangheili, followed by MAC shells from every ship around the Fire of Humanity. The Sangheili ships responded by firing plasma torpedoes at full intensity on every UNSC ship, lowering the shields of all the frigates at once. The second salvo from the UNSC warships' MAC cannons lowered the shields of the Sangheili ships, but, since there were more of them than the UNSC had there, the Sangheili still had the upper hand, even with their shields out of play. The rebellious Sangheili Battlecruisers charged in closer, but still firing their plasma torpedoes. They immediately disabled all eight frigates.

'Captain, our escort has been disabled. It's just us against them.'

The Chief Navigator informed while looking to the sides, seeing the Charon-class Light Frigates in flames with some exploding.

'Captain! We're losing our shields! The power is being drained fast and our slipspace drive is not responding!'

Jessica informed and then John had to give the most uneasy order "shipwide evacuation.

'Jessica, this is the hardest order of my life. Evacuate the ship.'

John said, while assuming full control of the ship from his chair.

'But Captain!'

Jessica wanted to argue, but John was in no mood to argue.

'Do it! Evacuate ASAP!'

John directed the fire of the ship's weapons on every CCS-class Battlecruiser, disabling three using the UNSC Fire of Humanity's MAC cannons. Everyone aboard the ship began leaving it.

The evacuation order was transmitted across the ship and the crew began running to the nearest Lifepods. There was chaos as the ship was taking damage across three sides, the fore, portside and starboard areas. It was a mess. Crewmembers trying to escape were caught in many explosions erupting from the ship's walls. Fires appeared all across the decks, even on the bridge.

Many crewmembers screamed in agony to be rescued, but the rest couldn't save them in time as the Lifepods were already leaving the once mighty vessel.

John's Sangheili girlfriend Rala was being dragged away to the nearest escape pod by five ODSs, while she wanted to stay aboard the ship, with John. She didn't want to see the ship fall with her love still on it, but it was too late. When she freed herself from the ODSs, the escape pod already left the ship. Rala tried bashing the door open, but then she fell to the cold floor of the escape pod and

began dropping tears. An ODST tried easing her pain.

'We all feel sorry for your loss, ma'amâ€|'' The ODST tried in vain as Rala didn't want to see anyone else but John. Suddenly, a bright, blinding light appeared and everyone looked out the back window to notice the UNSC Fire of Humanity exploding right in the middle of the rebellious fleet, severely damaging the nearby ships. Everyone in the escape pod immediately began grieving, while Rala was the only one crying.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Meanwhile, the UNSC Fire of Humanity's debris field.<br>\*>'Captain, our shields are down.' A voice was ringing in John's ear while he was still recovering from the nuclear blast.

'Captain, wake up!'' It was Jessica that was trying to wake him up.

'Soâ€| did we fail?'' John expected the worst, but he was wrong. A huge portion of the fleet was destroyed, leaving only twenty ships active and combat capable.

'No. Their ships have received massive damage and most are destroyed.' Jessica informed, with no emotion coming from her voice.

'Damnâ€| well, I hope they believe I am dead, because I will NOT attempt this again. We barely escaped! Besides, I think my thruster pack is burned down.' John said while trying to activate his thruster pack. He could not activate it anymore due to the damage it suffered. Suddenly, he noticed the rebel ships leaving the system. He brought up his left hand to look at his TACPAD and see how much oxygen he has left.

'Not enough for a day.' John muttered to himself, cursing that he can't get infinite amounts of oxygen. 'I'm down to hoping now.' John began wishing for a UNSC fleet to arrive and save him, because he had enough oxygen for ten hours. John began remembering his escape.

><strong>\*>Flashback, before the destruction of CFV-100.

><strong>'Captain, we've lost eighty percent of our hull! The ship can NOT take much more of this! It's going to explode!'' Jessica warned the Captain of the imminent danger of death.

'I know.' The Captain set the firing solutions on an automatic mode, letting the massive shelling of the rebel ships continue, while Sandman grabbed Jessica, who was loaded in a chip, placed the crystal chip into his helmet and put his helmet on. After making sure his suit is fully vacuum sealed, John began running to the nearest hull breach. He ran as fast as he and his Spartan augmentations allowed him across all the debris scattered and floating in the bridge deck of the ship that has lost a portion of its gravity and continues to vent atmosphere.

'Captain, the ship's gravitational poles are rotating. Prepare to land on your head.' Jessica informed of the gravitational instability and John immediately rolled around, landing safely on

what was once the ceiling. He kept running forward until he reached the hull breach of the bridge deck. The breach was so big that it opened up twenty decks. John was observing all the debris flowing out of the ship and the dead bodies of his crew members. It was a truly sad sight, but he had to leave if he wanted to survive.

'Jessica.' John took a detonator that was attached to his right thigh. 'Are the HAVOK tactical warheads in place? Have your sub-routines moved them closer to the reactor?' John asked, just to be sure. He wanted the ship to go down in a loud bang.

'Yes, Captain. I managed to get two HAVOK warheads closer to the reactor, but before we blow them up, I suggest we get to minimum safe distance which is ten kilometers.' Jessica reported in an enthusiastic voice, awaiting the result.

'Very well.' John confirmed her report and activated his Thruster Pack. The pack let him fly away from the crumbling warship at a quite large speed. When John was at a distance of six kilometers from the UNSC Fire of Humanity, he pressed the button of the detonator and the HAVOK nuclear warheads immediately exploded, dealing damage to the reactor, which then exploded in a mighty explosion, generating a temperature as large as one hundred million degrees per Celsius.

'Captain John Sandman, UNSC Navy, Spartan Four. Commanding Officer of Battlegroup Foxtrot.' The Captain spoke about himself just before the massive explosive wave reached him and pushed him away. Many small pieces of debris were flying faster than bullets and scratched some of John's armor, damaging his Thruster Pack, but the pack was still operational enough to allow him to decelerate.

**\*\*Present time.**

><strong>'I. Hate. Floating.' John cursed that he was unable to move thanks to the significant damage dealt to his Thruster Pack.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Lifepod 0391, January 26<strong>**\*\*th\*\*\*\***, 1531 hours by UTC.

><strong>Rala couldn't stop grieving from the loss of Captain Sandman and the ODST's were wondering if she could ever lock herself down.

'I know Captain Sandman was dear to her, butâ€¦ damn, I justâ€¦ I don't want to sound too rude, but can she try to hide her emotions?' One of the ODST's talked to another one.

'Shut up, Private.' An ODST Sergeant ordered for the Private to shut up. The Sergeant got up in hopes to get Rala back to her normal state.

'Ma'am, c'mon, get up. You shouldn't continue crying like that, better start hoping that we get rescued so that we might find the Captain.' The Sergeant offered his hand to help Rala up, but her gaze immediately turned to an infuriated one. She didn't say anything, but the Sergeant immediately pulled his hand back and felt shivers run down his spine. He was too afraid to talk. He stepped back into his seat.

'Hey, Helljumpers, we've got a slipspace signature and a friendly IFF. It's a UNSC warship coming by.' The pilot of the Lifepod informed of his findings when he saw a massive five and a half kilometer UNSC warship emerge from slipspace. It was one of two most advanced vessels in the UNSC Navy, the other being the UNSC Infinity and it seemed to be of the same class as the Infinity.

Rala immediately approached the pilot, looking at the massive Infinity-class Warship launching dozens of Pelicans to retrieve the Lifepods.

'Lifepod Oh Three Nine One? This is Pelican Delta Victor Eight Six, welcome aboard the second most advanced ship in the UNSC Navy.' The pilot of the Pelican notified the survivors in the Lifepod just before he used the Pelican's magnetic grapple to attach the Lifepod and transport it aboard the Infinity-class Warship.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Half an hour later, Infinity-class Warship's bridge, January 26<strong>\*\*\*th\*\*\*\*, 2554.

><strong>Rala 'Thenam had broken out of the medical bay, went past many guards and arrived at the bridge where Lord Terrence Hood was present, directly controlling the Search and Rescue operation to find the survivors of the destroyed vessel.

'Admiral!' Rala barged in the bridge, completely avoiding the military code of asking permission to enter.

'Miss 'Thenam, we're aware that you want to find the Captain and we're trying the best we can. We can't find him fast enough with the distance the debris has spread out.' The Admiral was certain that's why the Sangheili female rushed in the bridge, furious and sad at the same time.

'It's not good enough!' Rala wanted to find John faster, but the Admiral then offered a choice for Rala.

'Well, you can always get a dropship in one of the hangar bays and head out to search for him yourself.' The Admiral said and Rala immediately ran off to the nearest hangar bay that has a Pelican dropship ready for a search and rescue operation.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Fire of Humanity's debris field, 1554 hours by UTC.<br>\*\*\*'Infinity-class Warship?' John asked the AI that was in his helmet.

'Yes, Captain. It's definitely an Infinity-class Warship and apparently it's searching for us.' Jessica confirmed John's thoughts.

'Wait, how do you know it's searching for us?' John raised an eyebrow inside his helmet, looking carefully at his visor's HUD.

'Because those dropships have been illuminating their searchlights all across the debris field, trying to find a body.' Jessica explained while John was slowly moving his head around. He also

looked at the oxygen level in his suit as it was dropping. Less than eight hours were left and time was running out.

'If only my Thruster Pack wasn't burned down, then I'd be able to reach the warship's nearest unsealed hangar.' John cursed at his suit's Thruster Pack for burning down.

'Keep your hopes up, they'll find us.' Jessica tried cheering the Captain up, but the debris was scattered across a large radius and it made finding a single target, especially a SPARTAN-IV clad in black armor, brutally hard.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Six hours later, Infinity-class Warship's bridge.<br>\*'Admiral, we've covered only about sixty percent of the debris field, but we cannot find any sign of Captain John Sandman or any other survivors— hold on a second.' The Admiral immediately leaned closer to the holo-table when he heard the pilot break up. Lord Hood thought that he must've found something.

'Admiral, we've found someone but it definitely isn't Captain Sandman. It's someone not in UNSC archives.' The pilot apparently had pulled the survivor inside the dropship. Admiral Hood wasn't happy as the search for a war hero is going too slowly. He had a feeling deep down in his gut that the Captain is nearing his death, but he couldn't tell where he was. He approached the bridge's frontal observation area to look at the debris field in front of the warship.

\*\*Meanwhile in the debris field.\*\*

>'Captain, we're running dangerously low on oxygen and I've detected a leak in the suit. Small amounts of air are escaping into space, so we're venting air.' Jessica informed the Captain of the news about his armor. Apparently the armor was punctured in a very vital area, so the oxygen levels are dropping faster.<p>

'You're telling me something that I am feeling already.' Captain Sandman replied to Jessica with difficulty as he could feel the lack of oxygen.

'A few Pelicans are approaching us. Perhaps we could try reflecting some light with something?' Jessica suggested, but there was nothing reflective within reach. John could try throwing a bullet that was attached to his armor's shoulder pad.

'There's not a single mirror here— nope— unless—' John slowly moved his hand to his left shoulder. From it, he removed the M118 FMJ-AP, 7.62x51mm bullet that was attached to the shoulder pad and looked around to calculate which Pelican was closer. He noticed that the Pelican on the right was closer, so he slowly moved his arm towards it and released the bullet. He had high hopes that the bullet would attract the attention of the pilot.

'If this— doesn't work—' John slowly passed out as the oxygen levels were critical and his HUD began flashing red from the inside. The bullet that he threw flew very slowly across the distance and it had to pass fifty seven meters to get in the searchlight of a Pelican dropship.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Pelican India 078 (I-078), 2214 hours by UTC.<br>\*\*\*'Ma'am, we're trying what we can, but not even a Spartan can find the Captain faster.' The pilot tried to calm a female down. It was Rala who was upset and couldn't calm down. She wanted to speed up the process of finding her beloved Human. She kept carefully scanning the debris that was illuminated by the searchlight when suddenly she noticed something very small but shiny slowly fly by.

Rala immediately pointed at the shiny object and the pilot used his helmet's zooming function to see what it is.

'Ma'am, it's just a bullet. The armory of the warship must've protected some-' The pilot tried to explain that there's no reason to bring the hopes up, but Rala interrupted him.

'This is a special bullet. It's shinier than the rest and only person always carries one around on his shoulder' Rala pointed for the pilot to turn immediately to the right. The pilot complied and turned the Pelican dropship ninety degrees to the right and began illuminating the searchlight when he found a MJOLNIR GEN2 Black Recruit Powered Assault Armor floating, supposedly with a body inside it. The Pilot immediately approached the body and turned his Pelican around to load it inside the troop bay.

The troop bay's doors opened and the Pelican moved backwards. When the body was inside, the doors sealed shut and the troop bay regained atmosphere. The Pelican immediately flew back to the Infinity-class Warship.

'This is Pelican India Oh Seven Eight. We might have gotten the Captain in alive. Once we're back home, we'll check for vitals.' The pilot of the Pelican informed Fleet Admiral Lord Terrence Hood of their findings while flying back to the warship.

The Pelican flew for two minutes until it entered one of the multiple dropship hangar bays of the warship. A UNSC Marine platoon and a squad of ODS'T's along with a dozen corpsmen awaited the Pelican and once it landed, the corpsmen immediately went inside the troop bay the moment its doors opened. They quickly removed the helmet and confirmed immediately that it was Captain John Sandman.

'What took you so long?' Captain Sandman asked once he woke up and the Marine detachment outside the Pelican immediately cheered as they could easily hear his voice. He slowly got up, taking slow but deep breaths. Suddenly, he saw a familiar shadow appear behind the Pelican. The shadow got bigger and bigger until the owner of the shadow finally appeared. It was Rala who slowly approached the Captain.

'Thanks for saving me, Rala.' John slightly coughed while the corpsmen scanned his vitals.

'Captain, you've endured a lack of oxygen without any trauma. I guess it pays off to have Spartan augmentations, doesn't it?' One of the corpsmen commented.

'Yeah, well, having Spartan augmentations doesn't protect you from

losing consciousness or having the need to cough a lot later on.'" John slowly got up, picking up his helmet on the way and approaching Rala.

'Well thenâ€¦ I guess I'll have to file a million page action report after today's events.'" John sighed, still coughing a bit after. Rala offered help to help him get to the bridge and John gladly accepted the offer, placing his hand around her waist.

'Now let's get to the bridge.'" John was ready to face a severe punishment from Lord Hood.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Infinity-class Warship's bridge. 2236 hours by UTC, January 26<strong>\*\*\*th\*\*\*\*, 2554.

><strong>Rala and John entered the bridge together, seeing the Fleet Admiral dressed in his white uniform, wearing his every medal and ribbon that he's achieved. The Fleet Admiral came closer to the pair, but he didn't seem angry at all, on the contrary, he looked rather happy.

'Captain, it's good to see you alive.'" The Admiral congratulated the Captain on cheating death and offered his hand for a hand shake.

'Yeah, well, cheating death isn't a very pleasant thing to do.'" John replied with a slight smirk on his face and accepted the hand shake offered by the Admiral.

'Well, Captain, we didn't anticipate an ambush and I am sorry for the loss of your ship and any crew members that diedâ€¦'" The Admiral offered his condolences for this great loss.

'Yeahâ€¦'" The Captain still couldn't believe what had happened. A moment of silence followed as the Admiral took off his hat to honor those fallen.

After that short moment of silence, the Admiral put his hat back on his head and moved a bit aside, allowing the Captain to get a good look at the bridge that he will be commanding from.

'This ship belongs to you now, Captain. Top grade UNSC technology scavenged and reverse engineered fromâ€¦ well, everywhere. Only the flagship of the Navy is more superior to this one. I'll spend some time aboard the ship, see how it fares and then I'll get back to Earth.'" The Admiral gave command of the unnamed Infinity-class Warship to Captain John Sandman, who was stunned at this option to command an Infinity-class ship.

'Sirâ€¦ are you sure I am qualified to lead a ship that only Admirals should command? I led the last one into a trap and nine ships in total were utterly annihilated.'" The Captain wasn't sure if he could lead a ship again, after the destruction of the Fire of Humanity.

'Captain, this ship has top-of-the-line technology. Advanced shielding, advanced weaponry, improved reactors and slipspace capabilities. It'll hold \_a lot\_ longer than your previous vessel.'" The Admiral explained, slightly smiling and sounding

proud.

'Wellâ€¦ what can I sayâ€¦ thank you, Admiral.' The Captain freed from Rala and saluted to Admiral Hood, who saluted back.

'You're welcome. I'll be down in deck 241. If you need me, you can find me in the closest room to the bridge elevator.' The Admiral kept his smile on and left the bridge, leaving Captain Sandman in charge.

'Captain on deck!' One of the bridge officers stood at attention when the Admiral left. When he brought the attention of the rest of the crew, each and every one stood at attention, saluting to their new commanding officer. Each one of these officers seemed to be just out of the Naval Academy.

'At ease. I would like to see the search and rescue report.' The Captain approached the holo-table in the middle of the bridge and one of the bridge officers approached him with a datapad in his hands that he gave to the Captain.

Captain Sandman noticed that only five thousand crewmen of the UNSC Fire of Humanity were saved. There were twenty thousand men and women aboard that ship and its eight Charon-class Light Frigates.

Sandman immediately lowered the datapad and placed it on the holotable. He hung his head and began grieving for the fifteen thousand dead.

'Well thenâ€¦' John was slowly adapting to the more high-tech super heavy warship. 'â€¦ I would like a report of our full combat capabilities as soon as possible and while we're still here, I would like to find out where these rebels have gone to.' Captain Sandman's datapad was immediately taken by a bridge officer that gave it to him. He activated a file that had all the weapons of the Infinity-class Warship.

'Captain, we've got four Series-8 super-heavy MAC cannons installed. Sir, these MACs are way more powerful than any other shipborne cannon ever made by the UNSC. It's powerful enough to create craters several miles wide.' The officer informed of the primary offensive armament, impressing the Captain with the powerful CR-08 Series-8 Super-Heavy Magnetic Accelerator Cannons.

'If they can make craters like those then the Covenant better be afraid of Humanity now. Can it slip past their shields and do direct damage to the hull?' Captain John smiled, he was happy to hear of such primary offensive power.

'It's a chance, yes.' The officer confirmed the Captain's thoughts that a cannon of that power would slip past the shields and deal massive damage to a ship. 'We also have three types of missiles. We've got 350 Archer missile pods with 24 missiles per pod, 250 Rapier missile pods with 30 missiles per pod and 500 Howler missile pods with 20 missiles per pod. In total, we've got twenty five thousand and nine hundred missiles. Also, the ship sports 830 70 millimeter Fortress point defense gun batteries. A number of Mark 2488 Magnetic Accelerator Cannons and quite a lot of HAVOK Tactical Nuclear Weapons.' The officer finished introducing the Captain to the armament of the powerful vessel.



'Captain, we've got a situation in Alpha Centauri. The rebels have invaded the UNSC colony there and the Army that was garrisoned there has been completely overrun. All the forces are on the run. We must get there quick!'

A communications officer hurryingly informed the Captain once he intercepted a distress beacon.

'Jessica, I assume you're introduced to the ship and feel comfortable in it?'

The Captain turned his gaze towards the AI that he had silently inserted into the ship's systems.

'Yes, Captain, I've scanned all the systems on the ship from the shields and weapons to the basics like life support and gravity and I am well-accustomed to it. It actually feels a lot more comfortable than the previous ship.'

Jessica felt quite cozy in the Infinity-class Warship.

'Excellent. Set course for Alpha Centauri.'

The Captain was eager to test the ship in combat. He was fully aware the ship had ten Charon-class Light Frigates in a frigate hangar at the back of the ship, in its underbelly and it had hundreds of Broadsword strike fighters as well as Pelican dropships and other vehicles. He wanted to test this flying fortress in a battle. John still felt his heart racing from the previous event that left him without a ship for mere seven hours. He felt pain deep down in his heart for being responsible for the deaths of fifteen thousand brave men and women, for falling into a trap with a small portion of the Battlegroup.

'Are you sure that's wise, John? I thought I had lost you, but now you're risking it all again.'

Rala didn't want the events to repeat, but John was sure of what he'll be doing.

'I'm sure, Rala. They have lost more than two thirds of that fleet and they're weakened. With this new ship, we can finally end their search for me, even though I have no idea the fuck it is they want from me.'

John quickly answered, turning back to the holo-table where he looked at the Infinity-class Warship receiving the many Pelican dropships that were sent out on a search for him and the survivors of the ambush. After a short while, the ship's hangars sealed tight and the warship entered slipspace heading for the Alpha Centauri system.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>January 27<strong>\*\*\*\*, 2554, 2185 in the Mass Effect Universe. Valhallan Threshold. UNSC Dark Samurai.

><strong>A UNSC Prowler that had an eagle-like figure, roughly one hundred and fifty meters in length, approached the Migrant Fleet that was hidden in the Valhallan Threshold's Raheel-Leyya system, as it was known in the Galaxy's database.

><strong><br>\*\*\*\*'Commander, we're approaching the destination. Activating stealth system.'

A UNSC pilot informed the Commander who was standing in the middle of the Prowler's bridge, watching the progress.

'Can we attempt to contact them without being traced?'

Commander Chris C-333 was anxious to know if he can safely recruit Tali'Zorah into the team.

'Yes, Commander. Should I establish a communications channel right now?' The Commander was anxious to hear Tali's voice again.

'Do it.' The Commander ordered, patiently waiting for the pilot to answer back with progress. In a short while, the co-pilot reported that the communications channel was established to the fleet.

'Tali'Zorah, this is Commander Chris of the UNSC Cataclysm. If you are onboard any of those ships, please acknowledge immediately.' Chris sent the message to the Migrant Fleet, patiently waiting for an answer. Instead of an answer, Chris noticed that many ships were moving out of formation and beginning a search.

'Captain, if they bump into us, we're fucked.' A Marine informed, being scared of getting vaporized by a fleet that large. The Migrant Fleet had roughly fifty thousand ships of which a small number was combat-capable.

'Don't fuck around, Lieutenant. Evasive maneuvers!' Chris ordered the pilot to begin evading contact with any of the ships by making evasive maneuvers. The superior maneuverability of the Prowler allowed it to approach one of the larger ships.

Suddenly, a signal on a heavily encrypted channel was received over UNSC SQUADCOM.

'Commander, we've got a message over squad communications. It's heavily encrypted.' The co-pilot informed the Commander of what was just received and Tanya immediately proceeded to unlock the message.

'Twenty creds that we'll bump into something.' One of the Marines began a bet, offering twenty United Nations credits out of his next paycheck.

'You're on. I say forty that we stay undetected.' Another Marine accepted the bet, placing forty credits on the bet.

'Chris, I've managed to decode the message from your girlfriend.' Tanya got slightly jealous when she realized how anxious Chris was to get to Tali, making Chris blush under his helmet just a little bit.

'Chris, if you can hear me, then I am on the Neema. It's the ship at the very front of the Fleet. If you can get to me and attach to an airlock, I might be able to get aboard your ship. It's really good to hear from you again.' The message played in Chris's helmet and Chris immediately directed the UNSC Dark Samurai to the Neema. The ship maneuvered carefully past all the vessels in the fleet until it reached the target ship and began slowly to attach to the nearest airlock when suddenly things went south. A shuttle rammed into the Prowler, severely damaging a section of its ablative coating.

'Commander, ablative coating damage! Losing our stealth system!' The pilot informed as the main view screen of the Prowler was flickering red, signaling that the stealth system is shutting down and is in need of repairs. The ship was now on the sensors of every quarian ship in the system. Many warships immediately approached its

location.

'I believe you owe me forty creds now.' The Marine who suggested the bet won it, but was scared. He didn't want to die.

'Assuming we get out of this alive, Phil, I am going to kick your ass.' The second Marine answered, priming his MA5D and aiming it at the airlock.

'Evasive maneuvers! Get us out of here, pilots! Detach and head to slipspace!' The Commander ordered, but it was far too late. The active camouflage dropped and the ship was now visible to the naked eye. The quarians could easily open fire on it and they had it surrounded.

'We're boxed in! No way out unless we attempt an in-system slip!' The pilot was trying to calculate the coordinates for an emergency slipspace jump.

'Anything, but avoid getting us killed, pilot!' Chris was scared to die too. With hundreds of guns pointing at a light scout ship, it was a no-win scenario and the only way to survive was to do an emergency slip or hope for a rescue.

'Negative on the slip, Captain! I can't detach from the ship!' The pilot answered, his voice audibly shaking.

'Damnâ€¦' Chris slowly stepped away from the bridge, hoping that a miracle would save him and the UNSC Dark Samurai.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Chris has apparently gotten himself in big trouble, and he was very anxious to get his old team together, despite Captain Sandman's warnings that it might turn into a bloodshed. Will the quarians take the UNSC Dark Samurai into bits and pieces and examine its technology? Or will someone save the Prowler from certain destruction? Find out in the next chapter.<br>Anyways, I would like your opinion guys and girls. What should I name the new Infinity-class Warship that Captain John Sandman now commands? A name appropriate to the vast power of the class would be perfect. I have a few options myself, but I would like to know what all of you think sounds best.\*\* \*\*And no, this ship hasn't got the Forerunner tech... yet (Except for the energy shielding). ;)\*\*

## 8. Defense of Alpha Centauri III

\*\*Hey, bringing you all something more to read. So, freely dive in and remember to leave a little review with those possible upgrades for the story. ;)<br>><strong>

\* \* \*

><p><strong>January 27th, 2554 (Halo Universe), 0213 hours by UTC. Alpha Centauri III.<br>\*\*Alpha Centauri III, the Earth-like planet that the UEG colony was established on two hundred years ago, was being systematically destroyed by the Servants of Abiding Truth. Surprisingly, they were not glassing the planet even though it had no

UNSC naval defenses and its military garrison was routed entirely. The twenty ships were holding orbit one thousand and twenty kilometers above the surface of the colony and waiting for their footsoldiers to finish doing what they were doing.

Meanwhile, a single CCS-class Battlecruiser detached from the fleet and went forward on a scouting mission. What it did not know is that one million kilometers further, there was the INF-102, the Infinity-class Warship that is under command of Captain John Sandman.

'Captain, CCS-class Battlecruiser inbound.' Jessica reported and arranged the holo-table to display the Alpha Centauri III orbit, marking the INF-102, the Servant fleet and the colony itself. The INF-102 was closing in with one CCS-class Battlecruiser, with the Infinity-class Warship flying only at 392 kilometers per second.

'Fire two MAC shells on it and see how it fares. If it is still not disabled, fire all four at once.' Captain John wanted to see how effective the Series-8 MAC cannons really were and he turned his hands into fists, while using them to lean against the holo-table.

'Firing MAC cannons.' Jessica informed prior to firing the cannons themselves. The four cannons were arranged in a rhomb at the front of the ship, with one on top, two in the middle and one below. The two cannons in the middle were used and they quickly charged up, releasing two heavy MAC shells that flew straight for their target at incredible speeds. The two shells immediately lowered the shields of the CCS-class Battlecruiser upon impact and penetrated straight into its hull, destroying it utterly and leaving only a debris field as a remainder of the vessel.

'Great shot! These cannons are extremely powerful.' Rala commented on the raw firepower of the Series-8 MACs, taking a few steps back and blinking her eyes a few times to see if it wasn't a dream.

'Insanely, if I may correct you, 'Thenam.' Jessica was impressed by the firepower of the Series-8 herself.

'Take the ship further up. Let's wipe their fleet out and test what this baby can do.' John was anxiously waiting for the moment to make the rebellious Sangheili feel the full firepower of the Infinity-class warship that he now commanded.

The INF-102 quickly flew past the debris field, letting a few pieces of it scratch the ship's advanced energy shielding. The ship accelerated to one thousand kilometers per second and approached the rebel fleet holding orbit above Alpha Centauri III where an engagement followed.

'Deploy all frigates, power up all weapons. Prepare the missile pods.' Captain John curled his hands into fists and crossed his arms while sitting on a chair directly in the front of the holo-table at the front of the bridge.

'Aye, aye!' The officers in the bridge complied, opening the large frigate hangar at the middle, in the underside of the ship. From

there, ten Charon-class Light Frigates emerged and immediately flew to the INF-102's side, taking formation and firing their point-defense guns at the rebel fleet and its strike craft. The INF-102 released hundreds of F-41 Broadsword Exoatmospheric Multirole Strike Fighters that immediately began fighting with the Covenant Type-31 Seraph-class Starfighters.

'Fire main guns!' The Captain's order was issued and the main guns of all the vessels were fired. The Infinity-class warship's cannons dealt with two CCS-class Battlecruisers and dealt damage to a third, while the frigates managed to deal significant damage to many other ships of the Servant fleet.

'Captain, one CCS-class Battlecruiser is retreating into atmosphere. I calculate that it will take up position in the center of the main colony.' Jessica informed the Captain of a ship that was retreating from battle.

\_'Perhaps their leader is on that ship' we'll need to disable it somehow to prevent it from leaving the planet.'\_ John thought to himself, leading the INF-102 and its group while pondering on how to disable a CCS-class Battlecruiser.

'Captain, they are firing a salvo of plasma torpedoes!' A Bridge Officer alerted the Captain. The plasma torpedoes hit the UNSC warships immediately after, dealing minor shield damage to the Infinity-class warship while doing significant damage to the smaller frigates.

'Jessica, order a regiment of Marines to get down to the surface and engage the Covenant. Prevent them from executing any more civilians.' The Captain turned and gave an order while pointing at her with his index finger.

'Roger, sending the Fifteenth Marine Regiment down to the surface.' Jessica acknowledged the order and passed it down to the men and women of the Marine Regiment that put on their gear, loaded in the D79H-TC Pelican dropships and left the Infinity-class warship in large squadrons under the protection of two squadrons of F-41 Broadwords and three D79H-TC/MA Pelicans, the gunship variants of the standard dropships.

'Marines away, Captain.' Jessica informed the Captain while he was preoccupied observing the Servants preparing to retreat under sustained MAC shelling from the Charon frigates and the Infinity warship. John wanted to get down to the planet and join the fight to finish it.

**\*\*Alpha Centauri III, January 27\*\*\*\*th\*\*\*\*, 2554, 0531 hours by UTC, Northern Hemisphere.**

**><strong>**Squadrons of D79H-TC Pelicans were flying across the empty countryside, just outside the capital of the colony "New Athens" carrying the 15th Marine Regiment with its vehicles. The capital itself was covered with many towering skyscrapers and it could hold as many as twenty million Humans in there. The Marines could see many dead bodies littering the countryside and when they entered the city limits they saw that each and every house was suffering from plasma damage, having either minor damage or major damage.

Soon, the Pelicans came under anti-air fire and their escorts had to

break off to begin wiping out all the AA batteries that were installed and firing on the Marines. The Pelicans were forced to begin landing and they were just one hundred meters from the city center.

'Marines, disembark! Move it, move it!' Two thousand Marines were being deployed into the capital. Each Marine was wearing their standard green plated armor along with extra bags and pouches of ammunition. The majority of the regiment was armed with MA5D and BR85HB rifles, but some used the M395 Designated Marksman Rifles, M45D Tactical Shotguns, the M739 Light Machine Guns (Squad Automatic Weapon) and even M7/Caseless Submachine Guns.

Once the Marines were cleared out of the Pelican dropships, they grouped up with their squads and then with their platoons, getting ready for their next orders.

The Marines, upon hearing their orders from their Lieutenants and Platoon Sergeants, moved further into the city, immediately engaging the Servants that were well dug in. One platoon, upon seeing a perfect way to open a breach in the Servant defenses, immediately seized that opportunity. They loaded a civilian bus with satchel charges, placing two satchels in the front, two in the middle and two in the back along with a small bag of grenades in the front. One forty year old UNSC Marine "Staff Sergeant Nantz" volunteered to drive the bus directly into the Servant lines. The platoon tried to argue against, but the Staff Sergeant proceeded with his plan as he turned on the bus and drove it straight up to the Servant lines. The distance between him and the aliens was only five hundred meters and he had to keep the bus from decelerating when he wanted to jump out of it, so he attached an extra satchel charge on the gas pedal and immediately jumped out of the bus through the doors in the front.

When the Staff Sergeant landed on the cold, hard asphalt and made a few rolls to decelerate, he pulled out a detonator that was in one of his many pouches and waited for the bus to ram past the alien defenses. In a moment's notice, the bus rammed past the Servant lines and in the blink of an eye the Staff Sergeant pressed the detonator's button. The bus and the surrounding area in a five meter radius was set on fire from the resulting explosion.

The entire platoon came up to Staff Sergeant Nantz to check if he was still alive.

'Staff Sarge, you alright?' One of the younger Marines, who appeared to be twenty years old, asked the Sergeant who got up on his feet in his full gear.

'I'm fine. We're clear to proceed.' The Staff Sergeant primed his MA5D and prepared for battle, when through the radio one squad announced that they got pushed back.

'Fifth Platoon, this is Third Squad. We've been pushed back and your left flank is exposed! Retreat now before they encircle you!' The Sergeant of the Third Squad announced over the communications, seemingly not realizing that the Fifth Platoon managed to take out the brunt of the Sangheili that tried to strengthen the defensive line.

'Retreat hell, we just broke through!' Staff Sergeant Nantz refused to retreat and his superior, a Marine Lieutenant, agreed with him.

'Retreat hell!' The Lieutenant added and then the rest of the platoon joined, in unison.

'Retreat hell! Oorah!' The Marines were ready to proceed, raising their rifles in the air for the short moment that they announced their say.

'Marines, let's kick ass. Follow me.' The Lieutenant took his position in the front of the platoon and led them further into the city. The platoon immediately followed him, keeping their eyes on every angle, waiting for a Sangheili ambush.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>INF-102's bridge, 0701 hours by UTC.<br>\*\*\*'Captain, we've eliminated their space forces, but they've still got a Battlecruiser holding position above the Office of Naval Intelligence Alpha Centauri headquarters.' Jessica informed the Captain, reminding him of a single ship that is still a threat to the safety of the colony.

'Rightâ€| Rala, are you ready to take a Mammoth for a ride around the corner?' John had examined the vehicles held in the hangars of the warship and decided that by sending a M510 Siegework/Ultra-Heavy Mobile Anti-Aircraft Weapons Platform, a 'Mammoth' down to the surface, he could develop a plan to disable the CCS-class Battlecruiser and prevent it from escaping without risking utterly annihilating the entire capital.

'I think soâ€|'' Rala didn't know what John had in mind but wanted to find out, so she went along with his little ride.

'Follow me.' John began running towards the nearest elevator, leaving the AI â€" Jessica â€" in charge of the ship. Suddenly, he contacted her through the communications channels. 'Jessica, take the ship down into atmosphere, but don't fire on the Battlecruiser. Just take us down so that we don't have to suffer with the Mammoth delivery part. I've noticed that it weights nine hundred tons.' Jessica agreed with the order to avoid losing a squadron of Pelican dropships while they are delivering the Mammoth to the ground. She slowly took the INF-102 down into the atmosphere where it could cover the Pelicans with its hull while they deliver the Mammoth to the city limits of New Athens.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Raheel-Leyya system, Quarian vessel  
<strong>\_\*\*Neema\*\*\_, January 27\*\*\*\*th\*\*\*\*, 0756 hours by UTC.

><strong>Inside the Quarian ship â€" the Neema â€" which had cramped hallways and many civilians around, a rather large contingent of Quarrians, consisting of thirty heavily armed personnel with what seemed to look like assault rifles, was guarding the ten Humans that had trespassed their space in their stealth ship. Two out of six Marines looked very nervous as they thought that their hour of death has finally reached them. One of them was even visibly shaking from

fear.

'We're all going to die!' The more nervous Marine yelled out in fear for dying.

'Shut it, Marine.' A Marine Sergeant wanted to keep the Marine's mouth shut, but he couldn't do anything to keep him in discipline. The Sergeant looked at the Commander who was holding his hands behind his back, just like the rest of the crew. Their hands were tightly cuffed. 'Commander, why aren't you bailing us out?' The Sergeant was curiously asking the SPARTAN-III Commander.

'I don't want to risk your lives. The Captain would kill me if I came back with my crew in boxes. Either with paperwork, or with a pistol aimed at my head or in the worst case, I'd be left adrift in space without my helmet.' Chris answered with a calm tone, not wanting to take his chances. The crew was waiting already for hours until something would happen, until what seemed to be a high-ranking male of the species arrived to check on the 'prisoners'. The Quarian kept walking until he was standing face-to-face with Commander Chris, even though both of their faces were concealed by their helmets.

'You. What business have you on our territory?' The Quarian spoke after two minutes of being completely silent.

'We were just flying by and noticed that there was a fleet here, so we tried to slip past undetected when we suddenly scratched your ship and bumped in with another one.' Chris lied to keep their real intention a secret.

'How will you explain the message addressed to Tali'Zorah, then? Wasn't it made by you?' The Quarian got slightly angrier. Apparently, he was angered by the fact that someone is looking for Tali'Zorah.

'I ca-' Chris wanted to attempt to explain, but the nervous Marine interrupted him.

'It was him! Yes! Yes, h-he wanted to find that Tali and he sent that r-recording! We tried to d-dock with your ship to r-retrieve h-her!' The Marine said, being very scared of death from the hands of aliens. The rest of the crew just wanted to either knock him out, or kill him for betraying them.

'Aha! A cooperative one.' The Quarian said and approached the shaking Marine. He looked into his eyes that were shooting around, looking at every possible angle. 'Tell me who are you? You don't seem like Alliance.'

'We're from the UNSC-' The Marine tried to be as cooperative as he could as he thought that he would be spared and sent back to his family, if he proved valuable enough. Unexpectedly, an alarm went off across the ship.

'Admiral, we've got massive, unidentified contacts approaching. They're closing in!' Another Quarian popped out from behind some doors and approached the high-ranking Quarian that was trying to interrogate the captives.



'Send all ships to meet them at once!' The Quarian Admiral ordered, turning around at the last moment before the younger one disappeared completely behind the doors. 'Are they pirates, or Alliance?' The Admiral wanted to know what was threatening the security of the fleet.

'None, Admiral. I think they might be here for those ten.' The younger Quarian replied, checking his datapad after talking and leaving the area. The Quarian Admiral looked at the ten Humans and left, following the younger one.

The Humans were left under the guard of twenty Quarians armed with rifles when, completely by surprise, Tali'Zorah herself arrived in the room, looking at the captive Humans and noticing Chris C-333, making her feel a bit uneasy and slightly blush under her helmet, but unnoticeably.

'Sergeant, what do you think our odds are now?' Chris was ready to take the Sergeant's suggestion and free themselves.

'I think we're even now. I take the two in the very middle.' The Sergeant began picking the targets to knock out.

'Make sure to hit their helmets hard enough to make them crack.' Chris suggested as he knew the weak-spot for the Quarians. If their suit gets damaged, they may be forced down or they may flee.

'Go!' The Sergeant signaled, attacking two Quarians and freeing himself from the cuffs that were holding his hands together. He quickly punched out a rifle out of one Quarian's hands and used the butt of it to bash the visor of another open. The first one slowly recovered, but then received a knee kick to the stomach and a rifle swing to his visor. Soon after, Commander Chris joined the fight, quickly punching four Quarians out of action and grabbing two more by their necks, trying to make them harmless without actually killing them. The rest of the Marines rapidly followed, quickly knocking out the Quarians and forcing some to simply raise their hands in the air. When Chris was done taking care of the two Quarians in his hands, he let them fall to the ground and he approached Tali'Zorah.

'Helloâ€| Chris.' Tali'Zorah was quite happy to meet Chris, but she didn't show it from the outside.

'Hey, Tali. It's been a long time, eh? And look at you all grown up.' Chris commented on Tali's looks as her suit has changed since the last time he saw her. It seemed to look more of an adult variant than her previous one.

'Yeahâ€|' Tali slowly approached Chris to give him a warm hug, which Chris gladly embraced, letting Tali wrap her hands around him.

'Commander, it's the Cataclysm and the entire Battlegroup here to save us. I think SPARTAN-201's lost his mind.' The Sergeant informed of what he saw through the window. He saw most of Battlegroup Foxtrot arrive in a stand-off between them and the Quarian fleet.

'John, don't fire upon the Quarians. If they do, try to disable their weapons only.' Chris quickly brought up his communicator and contacted John B-201, informing him that he shouldn't attack the

Quarians unless provoked.

'Tali, we need to stop these hostilities before one of our fleets gets wiped out of existence.' Chris, afraid to see millions die in a pointless battle, was ready to run to the bridge and force the Quarians to stand down either by peaceful means or by force, it didn't matter. And run he did, but with Tali close up behind him, leaving the rest of the crew to guard the twenty knocked out Quarians.

'Chris, don't run that fast! I can't catch up with you!' Tali said, unable to match Chris in terms of speed. This was because Chris was a Spartan, not an ordinary Human so it was problematic for Tali to keep up with him.

After a short run, Chris finally arrived in what seemed to be the command center of the Neema "the equivalent of a bridge in UNSC terms. There, he found the Admiral and a few of his officers surrounding him, waiting for orders.

'You there! Admiral!' Chris wanted to keep the Admiral from starting a war with a force he does not entirely understand. 'Do not fire on those ships! If you do, you will bring upon yourself the wrath of a force you do not even know! My race has recently won a bloody war that asked for more than twenty billion lives and hundreds of planets and if you think that they'll stand down and let you take them out, then you are sadly mistaken!' Chris tried to appease to the Admiral's sense of honor, to lower the Admiral's esteem of his chances of victory.

'What? Are you sure they won't fire on us?' The Admiral seemed to listen to reason, but he didn't want to sacrifice the safety of his race.

'No! I gave them a standing order not to fire on you!' Chris kept trying to reason with the Admiral who sat down on his chair and began thinking. His officers immediately began suggesting the Admiral to stand down, but one of them kept insisting to open fire.

'Admiral, we must fire on them! There's no guarantee that they won't fire on us once we power down our weaponry and defenses!' The officer was getting rather impatient, but the Admiral was the one in power on the ship.

'Human, do you honor your promises?' The Admiral asked one last question, before making his final choice. In his mind, the Admiral leaned towards peace and prosperity between the two sides, but on the outside, no one could guess what was he thinking.

'I do. I don't make a promise, if I don't intend to keep it.' Chris was a man of honor, by keeping a promise, he would rise in the eyes of others.

The Quarian Admiral was still making a decision, but then finally he stood up, standing proudly and looking at the Human.

'Order the ships to stand down and assume protective formation around the Fleet.' The Admiral ordered to his officers and approached the Human Commander, when from behind him came the young Tali Zorah.

'Thank you, Han'Gerrel.'" Tali thanked the Admiral whose name really was 'Han'Gerrel'. She stood proudly by Commander Chris's side.

'Yes, thank you Admiral for listening to reason.'" Chris also thanked the Admiral, saluting to him.

'I still think our fleet could've wiped out yours.'" The Admiral quickly turned around and slowly walked back to his chair.

'Of course it wouldâ€|'" Chris sarcastically agreed with the Admiral and then turned his head to face Tali. 'â€|in a thousand years or so.'" Tali slightly smirked at the joke made by Chris.

'Admiral, permission to join Commander Chris's crew?'" Tali openly asked permission to join her old friend's crew. The Admiral was saddened to let a member of his crew go, but he had to as if the other Captain has made better progress luring the person over, then he had to let that person go.

'Granted, but keep in touch Tali. Your aunt will be pissed if she doesn't hear from you every once in a while.'" The Admiral reminded her about her aunt, Shala'Raam that would like to hear from her quite often. He kept murmuring to himself about the reports that he'd have to file now, because of this showdown.

'I will.'" Tali acknowledged her duty and turned back to Chris.

'Can we get aboard your ship now?'" Tali was anxious to get back aboard the massive Supercarrier that she considered home for a very short while.

'Yeah, anytime you're ready. We still gotta check on the Captain once in a while and see if he hasn't made any mistakes.'" Chris said, wanting to return to Caprica and check on John. Tali bounced on her feet, lightly, from hearing that she might get to see another old friend of hers. At least, she considers the Captain to be a friend.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Alpha Centauri III, January 27<strong>\*\*th\*\*\*\*, 2554, 0845 hours by UTC.

><strong>'This thing reminds me of a Scarab.'" Rala commented while standing on the massive M510 Mammoth. The Mammoth was twenty five meters high, having six massive wheels and a 'mini-MAC' on its upper floor.

'I think it's pretty much a counter weapon to a Scarab.'" John answered to Rala's comment about the Mammoth, thinking that it was what the UNSC scientists built as an answer to the Covenant Scarabs. 'We need to get this thing just a little bit closer to the Battlecruiser so that we might shoot its engines and make it impossible for them to leave this planet.'" John pointed at the mini Magnetic Accelerator Cannon that was installed on the Mammoth.

'How will it punch through the shields? Your frigates could barely lower the shields of a Battlecruiser, what hope does a mini version

of your famous MAC gun have?' Rala was skeptical about the capabilities of the mini-MAC, but this was not a Mark II Light Coil anymore. This was a more powerful MAC. More powerful than the old MAC gun versions. With a little extra aid, it could punch through shields too, so Captain Sandman contacted the INF-102 through his helmet communicator.

'Jessica, fire an undercharged MAC shot at the Battlecruiser to lower its shields. We need to make a clean shot at its engines from below. How copy?' John wanted the INF-102 to deal a critical blow on the ship's shields. Jessica immediately acknowledged his message.

'I copy, Captain. Turning the ship around and undercharging the Series Eight.' Jessica turned the massive 5.6 kilometer ship immediately by forty degrees, so that it may face the Battlecruiser that was still hovering over the towering skyscrapers of New Athens. Immediately upon lining up, the Battlecruiser tried evading by moving away, but it was too late for it as a Series-8 MAC was fired with a devastating sound, and the shell immediately lowered the Battlecruiser's shields, allowing the Mammoth to fire its mini MAC on the Sangheili rebel warship's engines. Once the Mammoth acquired its target, which was slowly trying to prowl away, it immediately released a shell with a loud bang into the Battlecruiser's engines, setting them on fire, but accidentally disabling the power supply to them, causing the ship to fall down and crash on the surface.

'Wellâ€¦ I hope the higher ups in that ship survived.' John immediately ran up the barrel of the mini MAC which was still pointed slightly upwards. From there, he wanted to see how far the Battlecruiser crashed and noticed that it was just outside the city limits, ten kilometers away. He immediately contacted the Marine officers of the 15th Marine Regiment and told them to head in the direction of the crash site.

'Captain, I hear you need a lift to the crash site. Come on board and get your free ticket to an enemy crash site. I predict free kills all around.' The male pilot of a D79H-TC Pelican announced with a strong Southern accent upon approaching the Mammoth and turning the dropship around, allowing the Captain to jump in its troop bay. The Pelican didn't leave until the Captain's trusted friend, Rala, got onboard it.

'All accounted for?' The pilot wanted to know if everyone's aboard, but he didn't bother to try and look. 'Very good. Let's get to bashing skulls and destroying armies. Hell yeah!' The Pelican's pilot immediately piloted the dropship to the crash site when he noticed a bunch of Elites trying to flee. He immediately remembered an AIE-486H Heavy Machine Gun loaded in the back of the Pelican.

'Captain, there's an AI-' The pilot tried to inform the Captain of the machine gun, but it seemed that he had managed to get it way before the pilot remembered.

'Got it already. Now bring us in over their heads and I'll deal with them.' The Captain stood near the troop bay's doors, holding the HMG in his hands and its barrel spinning, waiting for targets to appear on his HUD.

' 'Alright, this is Pelican Tango Delta Three Oh One. I predict a one hundred percent chance of a hot lead rain today, five kilometers to the Northwest from New Athens center. I suggest you pack a military-grade shield with you, otherwise you might catch a hot dish filled with bullets in your gut. Yeehaw!' ' The pilot of the Pelican made a weather forecast joke as the Captain began firing from the heavy machine gun, letting bullets drop on the heads of the retreating Sangheili rebels, dropping many of them, but some managed to survive the lead storm.

' 'Captain, don't you worry about the escapees. We'll get 'em.' ' A Marine Lieutenant informed while ramming a Sangheili rebel over with his M12 Warthog. ' 'We'll try to wound them so that we may get prisoners.' ' The Lieutenant stopped the Warthog and threw a Flashbang in the direction of a group of Sangheili rebels. Upon throwing the Flashbang, a platoon of Marines ran up to the Sangheili group, having their helmet's built-in protective glasses lowered and their eyes protected from Flashbangs, they immediately surrounded the group and arrested it, stripping them from their weapons and some of their equipment.

' 'Pilot, I can see a Shipmaster trying to run away and the MG is all out. Maybe you can get close to him? I can take him from there!' ' The Captain was ready to engage in a hand-to-hand fight with a Sangheili Shipmaster, just to get a little bit of intel out of him.

' 'It'll be done, Cap, just you wait.' ' The pilot informed and descended a bit before flying directly over the head of a Sangheili Shipmaster. Without noticing anything, the Shipmaster was ambushed from behind by a SPARTAN-IV. He managed to quickly retaliate and pushed the Spartan Captain back, but Captain Sandman didn't give up easily. John quickly gathered strength for a knock-out strike and immediately ran up the Sangheili, quickly avoiding a kick by moving to the side and making a straight punch into the Sangheili's mandibles, landing another punch in quick succession to the side of his face. The Sangheili staggered back a bit with his hand on his mouth, feeling the purple blood coming out of its mouth, it began to see everything blurred until it fell down to the ground and lost consciousness.

' 'Well I'll be damned, Cap. You kicked his ass. Now c'mon, this baby's ain't gonna wait forever. Load him up and we'll get back to the ship.' ' The pilot was amazed from seeing the Captain knock out a Sangheili in just two punches. The Captain picked up the Shipmaster and carried it inside the Pelican's troop bay.

' 'Tango Delta express returning home.' ' The pilot informed his passengers of the return back to the flagship and he quickly returned them back aboard the INF-102 where they were greeted by a squad of Marines that were ready to carry the Sangheili captive into the brig. The INF-102 immediately returned back to orbit once the Mammoth had been loaded back aboard one of its hangars and the 15th Marine Regiment slowly began pulling back from the city as well, with dozens of Sangheili captives.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>INF-102's bridge. Alpha Centauri III Orbit. 1022 hours by UTC.<br>\*\*Rala arrived in the bridge, noticing that John was missing

from it. She immediately approached the holo-table where Jessica's hologram was displayed.

'Jessica, where's the Captain?' Rala asked the AI, that immediately responded, upon finding the Captain in the ship.

'He's twenty one deck below, at a memorial wall.' The AI responded and Rala immediately ran off to the nearest elevator. Jessica quickly returned back to her duties.

When Rala appeared in the same deck as John, she noticed many pictures attached on the walls and some people around, grieving for the dead. She took her time to look around, finding the Captain, who was placing two pictures on the wall and then saluting to them both.

'Johnâ€¦' Rala silently approached John from behind and offered him a hug to help him forget the death of those two, as he seemed to remember them again after placing their pictures on the memorial wall. John quickly embraced Rala, as the both of them stood near the wall and hugged. Rala too observed the holo-stills of the two people that John placed. One was a male Sangheili Major, the other was an ODS female.

'I thought you'd lost these.' Rala silently whispered into John's ear. John kept hugging Rala, but he silently whispered back.

'I held them inside my chest piece until the proper moment would come. Voro was close to a brother to me, Rala. I cannot forget him.'

'Don't worry. You still have me, my dear Captain.' Rala looked into John's hazel eyes, seeing sadness in them, but the sadness was quickly changed with happiness. Happiness that John had someone to love, and someone that had equal love towards him.

'And I'm one hell of a lucky guy to have you as my girlfriend.'

Suddenly, by the memorial wall John could hear a dog breathing. He turned down to observe his feet where he noticed a German Shepherd sitting and observing him and Rala with its head slightly tilted. It seemed to be only a young puppy, below one year of age.

'Awwâ€¦ isn't he cute?' Rala immediately looked down to her feet, noticing the dog, although she didn't really know what it was. Rala didn't attempt to pick it up in her hands. When the dog barked once, she jumped back a bit and John slightly laughed and proceeded to pick it up in his hands.

'It won't bite. He's just happy. Lookâ€¦' John pointed at the dog's tail which was wiggling. 'â€¦he's wagging his tail. It means he's happy.'

Rala slowly approached John to put her hand on the puppy's head, trying to pet it.

'Don't worry.' John tried to help Rala to muster her courage to put away her fears of the little German Shepherd. She finally put her head on the dog's head and began moving it back and then repeated the

process two times.

'It's really cute.' Rala suddenly felt the dog licking its hand and she pulled it back, not knowing if its poisonous or not.

'Hah! Don't worry, Rala, it's not poisonous. It may be a little ticklish.' John encouraged Rala to continue petting the little dog. Suddenly, a Marine Corporal appeared right behind them.

'Sorry for the trouble it may have caused, Captain. It seems to have sneaked aboard one of our dropships while the regiment was being moved back aboard.' The Corporal stood right in front of the Captain, who, along with Rala, was petting the German Shepherd Dog.

'No problem Marine. Do you want him for yourself or did you plan to bring it back down to the city?' John quickly asked while still petting the dog.

'No, no, Captain, it's entirely your choice with what you want to do with it.' The Marine raised his hands up in a fake surrender and stepped slightly back, letting the Captain choose what to do.

'I think I'll keep it.' John decided to keep the dog around as a pet aboard the vessel for those moments when someone needs someone to lighten up the mood.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Hey, I've had a crazy idea of making an entirely sexually oriented story featuring John Sandman and Rala 'Thenam. What do either of you think? I doubt I'll be writing it without any support in the nearby future, but the opinion of the public matters to me.<br>Anyways, I really hoped you like this chapter. By the way, I've finally decided on the name for the Infinity-class warship and you'll see it in the next chapter.\*\*

## 9. Tali's Return and Rala's Discovery

\*\*Hey, another chapter for Halo: Reclaimers has arrived. I'd like you all to know that I am beginning work on that sex fic that I've had in mind for a while. Anyways, begin reading when you're ready.\*\*

\* \* \*

><p><strong>January 27th, 2554, 1434 hours by UTC. Alpha Centauri III orbit, INF-102's bridge.<br>\*\*The Infinity-class warship, INF-102, was still holding orbit around Alpha Centauri III and waiting for the Charon-class Light Frigates to finish patrolling the system so that the ship and its escort can leave the system in the hands of the approaching UNSC naval patrol.

Fleet Admiral Lord Hood was taking temporary control of the bridge while Captain Sandman and Rala 'Thenam were absent, but it was a very short command of the bridge as the Captain arrived shortly, along with Rala and a new pet.

'Admiral!' The Captain immediately saluted to his superior upon entering the bridge.

'At ease, Captain.' Admiral Hood stepped aside from the holo-table, allowing Captain Sandman to take his place at the head of the ship.\*\*

><strong>

>'Sir, what did you think about the test?' The Captain leaned against the holo-table, watching the hologram of the star system and the Charon-class Light Frigates slowly returning back to the flagship.<p>

'It was interesting. Two of their ships against one of ours and we took light casualties. Three ships received massive hull damage and four received damage in critical areas. I liked those odds.' The Admiral was sincere about his thoughts of the battle. The main game changer was, of course, the Infinity-class warship.

'Humanity will never again be on the defensive, Captain. Once we were just mice, hiding from threats, but nowâ€¦ now we can prevent them from occurring with ships like these.' The Admiral admired the Infinity-class, the ship that ONI was designing for twenty years.

'Yes, Sir!' The Captain saluted again at the Admiral, showing his great respect towards the aging flag officer. The Admiral saluted back and then noticed at the corner of his eye that one Autumn-class Heavy Cruiser and twelve Paris-class Heavy Frigates had arrived right next to the Infinity-class warship.

'Captain, I leave you in charge of your own battlegroup again, because I've got places to be right now. Remember, should you or your people require anything, do not hesitate to contact Naval Command.' Fleet Admiral Lord Terrence Hood bid farewell to the Captain as he left the bridge with the entire bridge crew standing proud and saluting to the departing flag officer.

'All hands, back to your stations.' The Captain signaled as he wanted to return to the main mission â€” the exploration of the second universe. The Charon-class Light Frigates had docked back inside the belly of the Infinity-class warship.

'Where to, Captain?' One of the Navigations officers asked the Captain who raised his head up to observe the crew staring at him.

'The other universe.' The Captain's order was crystal clear, the ship was to enter slipspace and jump to Caprica.

While the ship's FTL was charging up, John had received the names of the survivors from the UNSC Fire of Humanity and noticed that most of them were Sangheili volunteers, but a tiny number of the survivors was Human Marines. It was interesting to see Sangheili survivors, because that meant that John didn't have to visit Sanghelios again to recruit more volunteers. There was also Commander Shepard mentioned on the list and John felt a lot better knowing that he survived. It meant that he won't have to explain his death to his friends. Unfortunately, Captain Scarecrow died soon after he and his Lifepod was brought aboard the ship. It was badly damaged and was venting atmosphere, so he and his Marines suffered massive brain damage due to a lack of oxygen and died later on.



John, after finishing the list of the survivors, found an account of all the captive Sangheili and there weren't a lot of them. Merely a hundred and forty four were captured. One of them was the Shipmaster that John personally captured. There was also a list of refugees from the planet and there were at least eight thousand of them, fleeing from their own colony. All of them were transported aboard the Infinity-class warship and placed in the largest hangars, temporarily.

When John finished reading the reports, he finally decided to give the ship a real name.

'Jessica, from now on this ship will be known as the \_Infinite Dawn\_.' John grinned upon informing the AI of his idea for the ship's name.

'Sounds fitting for a ship of the Infinity-class. Very well.'

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Two hours later. Caprica, the Mass Effect Universe.<br>\*\*\*'Chris, I thought we'd get to meet Captain John here.' Tali was anxious to meet an old friend, but he was not where he should've been.

'I swear his ship was here when we left.' Chris commented.

'Commander, inbound target, high tonnage. It appears to sport an extremely heavy armament.' Tanya informed Chris who was staring blankly at the screen in front of him. There he noticed a warship slightly larger than his own emerge with UNSC insignias on certain areas of its hull.

'Holy shitâ€¦ it must be one of those new warships that the UNSC built.' Chris, still unable to produce any emotion, commented on what he thought about.

'Chris, I knew you were here. I hope you didn't get my Prowler damaged, destroyed or lost and I hope you're enjoying the sight of the UNSC \_Infinite Dawn\_ â€" my new flagship.' John Sandman quickly contacted the UNSC Cataclysm, shocking the bridge crew.

'Uhâ€¦ where's your old ship?' Chris asked when he failed to notice the old Phoenix-class, the UNSC Fire of Humanity.

'It was turned to a million ton debris field, sadly.' John remembered the destruction and loss of fifteen thousand lives.

'Oh, damnâ€¦ wellâ€¦ Tali wants to meet up with you and exchange stories, apparently. And I am pretty sure that she'll melt when she gets to see the slipspace core and the thermonuclear fusion reactor of your new ship.' Chris carefully looked at Tali standing right next to him and observing the massive, 5.6 kilometer long Infinity-class warship that was twenty kilometers away from the Cataclysm.

'Well, if she really wants to inspect my flagship, let her. I just hope she won't reveal any of our secrets that include armament, slipspace technologies, armor and energy technologies to anyone.'

John gave the go-ahead for Tali's departure to the UNSC Infinite Dawn. Soon after, Tali had arrived in one of the larger hangars which was overcrowded with refugees, reminding her of life on the Flotilla. In the hangar, she met up with Captain Sandman who was clad in his black MJOLNIR GEN2 Powered Assault Armor. Next to him was Rala 'Thenam in her Sangheili Special Ops harness.

'All of thisâ€¦ all these peopleâ€¦ reminds me of the life on the flotilla. Overcrowded with literally no room to maneuver or stretch aroundâ€¦' Tali commented on the sight as John and Rala turned to look at it themselves.

'It's very hard seeing all of these people suffer after what they've been through on Alpha Centauri, butâ€¦ I think Caprica will be perfect as their new home.'

'I agree with John.' Rala agreed and turned back to face the short quarian female in front of her. The quarian turned her head to face the larger Sangheili woman.

'Where's the heart of your ship?' The young quarian asked about the reactors, engines and the FTL drive, but Rala didn't understand the meaning. She simply tilted her head in a questioning way.

'Ehâ€¦ what?'

'The heart of the ship? Aren't you familiar with Human terminology after living forâ€¦ how many months with Humans?' Tali tried to carefully explain everything.

'Fifteen months and no, sorry, I haven't studied Human terminology that well...' Rala replied to the question Tali had asked, still keeping her head a bit tilted.

'The heart of the ship is its reactor, its faster-than-light drives and its engines.' Tali finally gave up trying to explain everything that she was studying about Humans. Surely, the Humans of either universes were quite similar.

'It's fifty three decks below, Tali. The elevator to that area is on the other side of the hangar. Once you get down there, you'll see dozens of technicians and scientists poking around, trying to do stuff.' John joined back to the conversation after looking at the refugees and kids walking and running around with Marines and ODSTs guarding them.

'Thank you.' Tali left immediately to find that elevator and take a look at the reactors that fueled a starship of this size. She imagined the reactors to be extremely large and to be humming like crazy, but what she didn't know is that a UNSC fusion reactor wasn't really that big and it was very silent, but emitting a massive amount of radiation.

'Why haven't you taught me anything special from Human terminology?' Rala complained that she knew too little about Humans.

'No idea. I guess I never really thought of teaching you words or sentences that we don't use very often.' John shrugged upon answering, his eyes running around the hangar, when he noticed a

Human clad in dark blue powered assault armor coming to his side. Apparently, the Human was a SPARTAN-IV as well, because the armor was a MJOLNIR GEN2 Powered Assault Armor of the Warrior type.

'Captain!' The unidentified Human saluted as soon as he was within five meters of the ship's Captain.

'At ease. Who are you, soldier?'

'Second Lieutenant Alice Selina Taylor, reporting for duty, Sir!' The Human introduced herself.

'Taylor? Are you a relative to Captain 'Scarecrow' Taylor?' John curiously questioned while crossing his arms over his chest.

'Yes, Sir! I am his sister, Sir!'

'What's your business aboard my ship?'

'Captain, I've been assigned to lead the Third Platoon of the Spartan Company aboard this ship. Haven't you been informed about it, Sir?'

'Noâ€¦ Did you know that this ship will be handed over to me?'

'Yes, Captain, and I volunteered to be onboard of it. My brother told me stories of you and your heroics. He never ceased to praise you, so I decided to enlist in the Spartan Four program directly from the UNSC Marine Corps and hopefully get deployed aboard your vessel. So here I am, Sir.' The Lieutenant seemed to be very happy that she got to meet the Captain in person, after hearing so much from her brother.

'Alright, wellâ€¦ welcome aboard the UNSC Infinite Dawn, Lieutenant. I am pretty sure you know the decks more than I do. Speaking of which, you mentioned a Spartan Company. Where are they?' The Captain wanted to know the exact location of the Spartan Company and he wanted to see them personally.

'There are approximately one hundred and fifty Spartans aboard this ship. All are stationed on the ship's Spartan Deck, twelve floors below.' The Lieutenant replied and awaited further instructions from the Captain.

'Very well. I'd love to see this Spartan Deck personally.' The Captain wanted a short tour of this new deck that was housing the Spartan Company. 'You coming, Rala?'

'No, I'll contact my mother back on Sanghelios and ask her about her life after what we've done to my father.'

'Alrightâ€¦ take care.' John left with the Lieutenant to head down for the Spartan Deck and observe the Spartan-IV company.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Spartan Deck, Deck 192, UNSC Infinite Dawn. January 27<strong>\*\*\*\*, 1756 hours by UTC.

><strong>'There it is, Captain. The Spartan Deck. Here one hundred and eighty Spartan Fours are being trained and housed as well as some Sangheili of your crew are training hard here, sparring with the Spartans. You can always come down to test your skills against the best of them in the sparring ring. Or you could go and exercise yourself in one of the training machines.'

'Hmâ€| a little training wouldn't hurt. I feel like I've began to rust in some certain skills like hand-to-hand.' The Captain tilted his head to one side until a crack was heard and then he repeated the same process for the other side.

'Well, I've got some proficiency in hand-to-hand and I've got a black belt in Karate. Perhaps we can go for a round? See what you're worth?' Lieutenant Taylor suggested an interesting option.

'Let's go. If I win, you'll get me the best whiskey on this ship. If you win, I'll publicly announce my current relationship in front of the Sangheili part of the ship's crew.' The Captain offered a bet that the Lieutenant couldn't argue with.

'You're on, Captain!'' The Lieutenant agreed and led the Captain into the sparring ring that was a mere hundred meters in front and then straight to the right from their location. Once inside the ring, the both of them assumed their ready positions before the battle. Captain Sandman slowly moved his left shoulder to face the Lieutenant with his fists raised up to the level of his chest with the left arm stretched out a bit.

The Captain began to taunt the Lieutenant, allowing her to make the first move. The Lieutenant was lightning fast and she grabbed the Captain by his armor's chest piece. The Captain was barely impressed as he quickly took the Lieutenant's hand and pulled her closer to him. He then threw his hand to the side, making a slap to the Lieutenant's face, staggering her.

'So much for the black belt, El Tee.' The Captain proceeded to run quickly behind the Lieutenant and raised her in the air without a single problem. Then, he quickly and skillfully let his arms go down with the Lieutenant still in his hands. He stopped his hands shortly before the Lieutenant's spine came into contact with the Captain's knee. This move would've broke the Lieutenant's spine for sure and would've disabled her, but this was not a fight to the death.

'TouchÃ©. Now, about that whiskeyâ€|'' The Captain celebrated his quickly won victory, but the Lieutenant wasn't about to give up. Once the Captain let her get back down on the ground, she made a roundhouse kick directly into his face, sending him staggering back a bit. The Captain raised an eyebrow when he noticed the incoming flurry of punches that he quickly began deflecting outwards. Once he saw the opportunity, when the Lieutenant's flurry began to slow down, he made a low punch to her stomach and then jumped up with his knee hitting her chin, sending her flying back. The Captain noticed that she was attempting to outflank him and hit him in his sides, trying to de-air him. His superior reflexes and combat experience helped him skillfully dodge the powerful kick by jumping back. After the dodge, the Captain quickly regained control of the situation by kicking the Lieutenant in the stomach, sending her flying to the other end of the ring. The Lieutenant was barely holding on her feet after that

kick.

'Still not ready to give up, Lieutenant? Where did you get your black belt?' The Captain's taunt angered the Lieutenant, forcing her to fly out of control and begin violently punching the Captain, catching him off guard. She made successful punches to his face, chest and stomach, punching the air out of his lungs and sending him back to the middle of the ring.

The Captain wiped his mouth from the blood that was coming out after the successful punches or unsuccessful blocks. The Captain, after analyzing that the Lieutenant's most favored way of attacking is making a flurry of punches, decided to leap at her and knock her out. He leapt at the Lieutenant, tackling her and forcing her down to the ground. He grabbed her by his chest piece, slightly raising her above the ground and he placed his fist at his waist level, preparing it for an uppercut. He took some time to think about it and then made the strike, swiftly crushing a vital nerve and causing the Lieutenant to lose consciousness.

'A necessary move to prevent further rage.' The Captain whispered and slowly placed the Lieutenant's unconscious body on the ground, getting up himself.

'Spartan Company! Front and center!'

After the Captain's order, the Spartan Company immediately dropped whatever they were all doing and rallied in front of their Captain, standing tall and saluting to him.

'From which UNSCDF branches are you all from and how long have you been serving?' The Captain was staring into each of the Spartan faces. When he noticed one of them come forth, closer to him. Judging by the stripes on his armor's shoulder piece, he was the First Lieutenant. In charge of the company.

'Captain, most of us come from the Marine Corps. Some are from the Army and some are from the Air Force, and both types of Navies. Most here have served only for one year. They've never seen the terror of the Covenant, but some have been serving for as much as four years. Personally, I come from Earth's Atlantic Fleet and I have been serving for three years.'

'Very well. You can get back in line now, Lieutenant.' The Captain took a few steps back, taking a good look of the Company.

'Is that how you're named? Just Spartan Company?'

'Sir, yes Sir!' The Company answered loudly and in unison.

'That's real bad. You know that just a name from a Spartan must be enough to cause chaos and fear into the enemy lines? It must demoralize.' The Captain was getting philosophical while trying to think of a good name for the Spartan Company and it didn't take very long for him to find the suitable word.

'Spartans! From now on, you are named Jaeger Company! If some of you don't know, Jaeger stands for 'Hunter' in German. We are the hunters of our prey, the defenders of Humanity and all of its

colonies. We are the Demons of our enemies.'" The Captain then looked up to the side where he noticed Rala standing on a balcony. The Spartans turned to look as well, but the Captain noticed it.

'Eyes front, Spartans!'" The Captain still looked at Rala who seemed to be smiling at him while the former was instructing the Spartans.

'Alright, dismissed. Go back to whatever you were doing.'" The Captain turned to leave the Spartan Deck, leaving Second Lieutenant Taylor sleeping on the floor. One of the Spartans saw the Sangheili Officer " Rala 'Thenam " leave as well, but he didn't care all that much. He went to Lieutenant Taylor's side to try and wake her up.

While in the elevator, both Rala and John reunited again after that short moment of being split apart and they noticed Tali behind them.

'So, how did your chat with your mother go?'" John asked with curiosity.

'Well, mother said that father is doing very well and he's not really angry after he thought deeper about it, but if you ever propose bonding then" he would most likely kill both of us.'" Rala answered, starting to fidget with her fingers.

'Why? If I would ever propose that we could keep it a secret from him.'" John took Rala's hands to try and stop her from acting nervous.

'But Sangheili tradition dictates that the father must have the right to choose what to do. He can choose to initiate a duel, to fight you and, in the case he wins, you will get executed for you are an outsider. A Human. Or" he can choose to avoid giving a definite answer and leave matters into the hands of the Sangheili Council or the Arbiter. It all comes with you being the Human.'" While Rala and John were discussing marriage, Tali was listening in on their talk with great interest, but then John turned his head to face her.

'Tali, don't mention this to anyone and you might even be able to have a special spot in discussing.'"

'I won't! I promise that I won't tell anyone, not even to Chris!'" Tali promised, but John immediately caught her when she named Chris.

'What do you mean not even to Chris? Is he your overlord or something?'"

'No" no! Well" Captain, I like him. More than anyone else.'" Tali blushed behind her helmet and the blush could be seen with John's enhanced eyesight.

'You don't have to be shy when revealing things to us. Some similar chemistry happened to me and Rala fourteen months ago. We can talk about this later, right now I have a ship to command and get used to.'" The Captain said and turned to face the doors. He knew that the elevator would stop at the bridge deck soon and got ready to leave

it. Tali and Rala would obviously follow him around for a while.

When the elevator arrived at the bridge deck, all three of them left it and went straight for the bridge which was one kilometer away, to the front.

'Tali, what did you think about the engineering section of the vessel?' John began questioning the Quarian.

'It's extreme! I've never found anything so high tech. What really got me interested was yourâ€¦ how did you call it? Slipspace drive! Yes, slipspace drive! I've never seen anything so powerful. One of your engineers explained to me what it does, but refused to say how it works. He seemed very kind in the refusal part. Creating miniature controlled black holes and transporting the ship to another dimensionâ€¦ that's a million years more advanced than our mass effect drives!' Tali was most fascinated of everything aboard the ship, even the eight feet tall aliens that occasionally showed up around corners and the Marines patrolling the hallways, clad in their green armor.

'I guess you already know more about my ship than I do. When I tried to understand slipspace technologies at school, I ended up with a bad mark due to a miscalculation that could send the ship to certain death in slipspace.' John mentioned the certain dangers of slipspace travels.

'What do you mean? It's dangerous to travel in slipspace?' Tali got more and more curious around this technology.

'Well, there is a thing called Slip Termination, Preventable or STP. It results from poor slipspace drive maintenance. When slipspace is activated on a poorly maintained slipspace drive, it results with incorrect transportation to slipspace and sends the ship and its crew to certain death. Things like these were widespread back in the twenty fourth century, right after the discovery of slipspace travel but now slipspace drives are maintained with the highest amount of effort. To this very day, we do not know where dozens of ships and crews were sent.' The Captain explained one of the dangers of slipspace travel â€" maintenance.

'Ohâ€¦ there's nothing like that in our universe.' Tali looked out of the window to notice the entire Battlegroup Foxtrot and another fleet orbiting around a planet that reminded her of Earthâ€¦ at least from all the entertainment vids that she's seen. She also noticed space stations with barrels sticking outwards from the planet.

'What are those?' She pointed at one of the stations.

'That's a Super Magnetic Accelerator Cannon. It fires an ultra-dense ferrous-electromagnetic slug at a fraction of light speed and the shell can cause enormous amounts of damage. In fact, the damage is so high that it can destroy one ship and the shell that was fired can still have enough power to cripple a second and damage a third. Or if lucky, destroy all three.' After the Captain's short description of the Super MAC station, Tali felt afraid to meet any of the Humans from the other universe. They were far too powerful and she knew it, but that didn't quell her curiosity as she felt more and more curious

about them.

'Officer 'Thenam, please report to the nearest medical bay for a diagnostic test.' A voice on the loudspeaker that spoke across the entire deck caught the trio by surprise.

'What? W-why me?' Rala was afraid of doctors, like every Sangheili, for the Sangheili have never accepted help from doctors for centuries.

'C'mon, don't be afraid. The doctors won't kill you and if you lose some blood it won't dishonor you. It's nothing bad to get checked up once in a while. Once you're done, I promise we'll do something fun together so that you may forget everything about it, if that helps.' John tried convincing Rala that visiting a doctor keeps many problems away and he actually convinced her, but only because he promised to do something fun with her.

'Alrightâ€| alright.' Rala turned around to head for the nearest medical bay that was located on the same deck as the bridge.

'Is every one of her race so afraid of doctors?' Tali asked, looking at Rala slowly walking away.

'Yes, it's in their warrior tradition.' John answered and opened the doors to the bridge that were right in front of him. Upon entering, everyone in the bridge saluted, standing at attention to their commanding officer.

'At ease, men. Back to your stations.'

'Captain, here's the report of the weekly supply arrival.' An Ensign handed the Captain a datapad that contained the list of supplies from a weekly convoy.

'Hmâ€| food, Hydrogen...' John quickly skipped his eyes over the list, seeing things like deuterium which is starship fuel, hydrogen which is used in ground vehicles, Titanium, ceramic materials, carbon nanotubes and extra personnel from Earth and Sanghelios. After checking the list, the Captain gave the datapad back and gave a nod from his head. The Ensign saluted and left.

'Now, Tali, here we can talk about your little attachment to Chris.' John wanted to speak with Tali in a very public place where a few dozen Humans were working and Tali felt that she was blushing uncontrollably.

'Look, Tali, I don't have the time to spend time alone in a dark corner. We'll keep it down to a whisper and if needed I'll shout out something stupid to remove suspicion.' The Captain suddenly noticed that half of the bridge crew was staring at him and Tali. He immediately proceeded to think up something stupid.

'Yes, Tali, I have given myself the pleasureâ€| ofâ€| taking off my armor, just dumping it somewhere on the ground, and walking around in the breeze of a planet, feeling its cold winds and warm air whiz around me.' John slightly elevated the tone of his voice and Tali looked away, slightly chuckling, because John really did remove suspicion. The crew looked like they saw just every day chatter going on and they continued their work.



'See? All done. Nowâ€¦ what was it that you want? Or do you want to keep it a secret forever?' John was ready to help Tali in any way he can.

'Wellâ€¦ I wanted to know what did he like. Is there anything in particular? Weapons? Items? Food?'

'Damnâ€¦ I swear if I have ever had a normal conversation with him, I'd have learned everythingâ€¦ butâ€¦ I think he likes weapons a lot. He's got a kukri with him that he's keeping extremely sharp whenever he has the free time.'

\* \* \*

><p><strong>UNSC Cataclysm, bridge.<br>\*\*\*'Chris, I've managed to pinpoint the locations of Krilus and Edward and it's funny.' Tanya chimed in, disturbing Chris from his moment of sleep.

'Hm? Whatâ€¦ what's funny?'

'Wellâ€¦ they're both on the Citadel. Remember? That giant space station in the middle of a nebula. I am sure they remember us and will let us passâ€¦ otherwise we'll have to visit it with serious firepower.'

'Wellâ€¦ waitâ€¦ on the Citadel? What are we still doing here? Send a message to the Captain and take us to the Citadel.'

'Alright, Chris. I'm waking John out of cryo-sleep and sending a message to the Captain with a suggestion to get the Battlegroup ready.' Tanya began doing multiple tasks at once â€" waking John B-201, sending a message to Captain John Sandman and spinning up the UNSC Cataclysm's FTL drive, so that everything would be done with perfect timing, proving her extremely high AI skills.

After the message was sent, the UNSC Cataclysm opened up a slipspace portal and entered it, heading straight for the Citadel in the Widow Nebula.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>UNSC Infinite Dawn, bridge. 1830 hours by UTC.<br>\*\*\*'And yet again he goes off to save his crew members and asking me to get the group ready in case things go south for him. If this keeps going like that, I wouldn't be able to lie to Admiral Hood in my daily reports and will have to get him demoted due to him crossing the chain of command. And then promoted again for some random event that he would distinguish himself in.' John was getting tired of Chris's recklessness and he was really considering to put the Cataclysm and its crew on house arrest. John was not really going to do any of that because Chris's actions pay off, but he still felt like making a silent facepalm.

'Captain, we've just received six new ships for our Battlegroup - two Autumn-class Heavy Cruisers and four Midlothian-class Destroyers.' A Lieutenant of the bridge crew approached the Captain after receiving a message from a recently arrived flotilla of ships.

'Autumn-class? I've never heard of that class.' John turned his gaze a bit to the right where he noticed the fresh flotilla slowly taking position between the rest of the ships of Battlegroup Foxtrot.

'Those ships were designed after the success of the UNSC Pillar of Autumn, which was a Halcyon-class Light Cruiser. A very massively refitted and rearmed Halcyon Cruiser. The Autumn-class Cruisers have the same MAC and fusion reactors as the Pillar of Autumn, but they sport a lot more missiles and point-defense guns than their ancestor. Also, they're three hundred meters longer.' The Lieutenant described the Autumn-class Heavy Cruisers and they seemed to be pretty powerful, since they were built after the ship that discovered the first Halo and that destroyed a Covenant Supercruiser after taking it head on over Reach â€" a feat that no other ship could do, despite having heavier armament than the Pillar of Autumn.

'Alright. More ass-kickery guaranteed, then.' The Captain seemed to be a bit happy to have Autumn-class Heavy Cruisers at his disposal as that meant that his Battlegroup could cause a lot more trouble before going down, if it would ever go down, but then, like a clock in the morning, his communicator activated with someone speaking very fast on it.

'Captain Sandman. Doctor Mordin Solus here.'

'Solus? The Salarian, Shepard's friend? Why are you aboard the Infinite Dawn?'

'Yes. Yes. There is a slight situation with your friend Rala. She has left to her room, angry and in a hurry, after she found out the results of her diagnosis. And I got aboard after one of your doctors invited me over. After he read my personal file. Also, your friend kicked Commander Shepard in a nearby wall. After he tried to keep her calm. I imagine that it was not painless. Your walls are made of extremely durable material.' John became curious about what diagnosis was the dialogue going on about, but at least this Salarian doctor provided an answer to another question.

'Huh? Diagnosis? Which one? I'm no medic, but there can be thousands.'

'Fertility test. How to say thisâ€¦ Rala is infertile. She cannot have children.'

John, after hearing that Rala is infertile, dropped everything and immediately began running towards the exit of the door, quickly vaulting over his chair that was in the way. His fast sprinting skills eventually delivered him to the elevator, which he used to ascend one floor above. Immediately after arriving, he continued running towards his cabin that was at the very front of the deck where anyone could get an excellent view of space. Once he arrived at the door, he noticed that it was locked. He turned to the nearby console and wrote down the override code which immediately opened up the door. Right after the doors opened, the Captain saw nothing but darkness in his own cabin.

'Ralaâ€¦?' John softly spoke, wanting to find Rala, but all he could hear was a silent cry. He entered the room and sealed the door behind him. He tried to concentrate on seeing in the dark and his

eyes completely adapted to it in nearly two seconds thanks to his Corneal Implants, letting him see better in the dark. He could see someone lying on the bed and shaking, emitting sounds of sadness.

'Rala!' John slowly approached the person and wrapped his around, carefully sitting down on the edge of his bed.

'John!'' Rala immediately wrapped her arms around Captain Sandman and hugged him, trying to find comfort in his presence. She wanted to try and explain what was going on, but couldn't find the courage within her. 'John! I!'

'Shh! I know everything about it.' John thought that Rala was naturally infertile, from birth.

'No! John, my! my womb was seriously damaged!'' Rala was slowly overcoming her deep emotional scarring. Being infertile in Sangheili tradition means that no one would ever want that person, not even their parents and Captain John Sandman knew that very well.

'By who? How?!' John felt his anger slowly build up.

'Those who! c-captured me!'' When Rala answered that it was the Servants of Abiding Truth, John's anger reached its highest point ever and John could not control it. He was literally twitching from anger as he let Rala go, stood up and emitted a loud shout, ramming his hand into the nearby wall. He slowly began breathing deeply, trying to control his emotional outburst and he pulled his hand back from the wall, observing it. It was twitching from pain as the wall was a durable, one meter wall of Titanium-A3.

'! John!?' Rala felt like John would go insane after this. She thought that she could've had a shot at getting pregnant from a Human, but after learning these tragic news, she just couldn't stop crying. John sat down next to her again and wrapped his left hand around her neck, while moving his right one directly over her stomach.

'I promise that I'll find a way to help you.'

What the both of them did not realize was that Doctor Mordin Solus was eavesdropping on them from the outside of the cabin while attempting to find a proper medicine to Rala's situation. He eventually decided to knock on the door.

'Who is it?'

'Doctor Solus. I want to check on your friend.'

'Fine, come in but I can't promise your security.'

'Security not an issue. Can handle myself very well.' The Salarian thought that he could handle Rala's outbursts of anger and sadness and the doors in front of him eventually slid open, letting him in and closing immediately after he got inside the room.

'Well?' The Captain was not a patient one either, as the Salarian was taking his time observing Rala, seeing the Captain's hand over

her stomach and with her hand over his, it was probably hope that this situation can be dealt with.

'Both universes have genetic engineering and advanced medical knowledge. Can use this to find a cure or fix womb if you let me access the databases.' Solus had only the best intentions in his mind, wanting to prove his skills as a doctor. 'Created genophage - fertility limit for Krogan. Can cure many problems. Cannot cure, if not allowed to. Have deep knowledge of genetic engineering. You are genetically engineered as well. Could tell from when we met and when you are wearing this armor.'

John quickly thought about it and eventually allowed Doctor Solus to access the medical databases of the UNSC, but with severe restrictions to anything else, like weapons or the SPARTAN Programs. Restrictions that would be monitored by a part of Jessica.

'Alrightâ€¦ you'll get your access to our databases, but don't try to copy anything. Jessica will be monitoring your activities. Other than that, I can grant you many resources at your disposal.'

'Excellent. Only need one resourceâ€¦' Mordin pulled out a needle that came from the Infinite Dawn's bridge deck medical bay. 'â€¦ her blood.'

Rala immediately curled up behind John, hoping that he wouldn't let her dishonor herself.

'Is there truly no other way than staining her honor? I respect her species' traditions.'

'This not about honor. This is about her own descendants. Other than that, there is one other way. Long, extensive study of her biology and physiology. That would be more dishonorable, wouldn't it?' Mordin stood up and prepared his needle for its job.

Rala slowly stepped off the bed, passing her hand to Mordin, who quickly inserted the vial into one of Rala's bloodstreams, taking a sample of her blood and filling a small vial with it. After removing the needle from Rala's hand, he hastily went towards the exit.

'Captain Sandman, your Chief Medical Officer has asked you over as well. He would like to see check your own health and your augmentations. By his words, you adapted far too fast to them. He wants to know if you're alright.'

'I'll be there in a few minutes.'

\* \* \*

><p><strong>UNSC Cataclysm, Widow Nebula. January 28<strong>\*\*\*\*, 0013 hours by UTC. 2185 (Current universe).<strong>'Chris, there it is. The Citadel. And they're sending two dozen light-weight vessels to intercept us.' John B-201 observed the colossal deep space construct and its protective fleet.

'Yeahâ€¦ wellâ€¦ let them deliver us to the Citadel. We'll begin our

search of Edward and Krilus there.'' Chris knew that the vessels approaching them were meant for escort and allowed them to guide the ship into the largest docking bay it had, which was really meant for ships five times smaller than the Cataclysm.

'Any other great plans?' Tanya's hologram appeared in a nearby holo-tank.

'Nope. Just get Krilus and Edward back aboard. But we're not going in with our armor.' Chris turned around, facing Tanya, revealing his front side. He was dressed in a black tuxedo, similar to John B-201 who was wearing a slightly brighter one.

'Undercover operation. Great. Am I coming?' Tanya wanted to get off the limited space of a starship, but Chris didn't approve.

'No. You stay here and make sure NO ONE attempts to breach our defenses.' Chris immediately left the bridge with John, putting on an overcoat and hiding two Boltshot pistols in it.

'Let's go.' John was already at the closest airlock, waiting for Chris to appear.

'Right. I never imagined that our Headhunter specialization would take us to this level. Blending in with the crowds. But hey, let's go.' Chris opened up the airlock and quickly took a look around.

'Right. Area is clear. Time to find the Turian and the Human.'

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><p><strong>Well... I hope you liked it. If you have any questionssuggestions, leave them in a review or in a PM and I will try to answer if I have the time.\*\*

## 10. Captain's Second Augmentations

\*\*Hey all, bringing you some more sci-fi, drama and stuff to read. So... let the reading begin, eh?  
><strong>

\* \* \*

><p><strong>January 28th, UNSC Infinite Dawn's Bridge Deck Medical Bay. 0034 hours by UTC.<br>\*\*\*'Captain, I'm sad to inform that you're not entirely a Spartan Four yet.' The Chief Medical Officer informed Captain Sandman of the results of the Captain's augmentation check.

'What the fuck are you talking about? Are you saying ONI used cheap augmentations on me?'

'No, Captain. They've been using what they had at the time. Enhanced Spartan Three augmentations.' The CMO brought a datapad to the Captain, showing his enhancements and the possible, and new, SPARTAN-IV ones that aren't grafted into him.

'I have the necessary resources on the Infinite Dawn to graft all

the Spartan Four augments into you. From Carbide Ceramic Ossification to Artificial Platelet Injections.'

'I think you'd know that I need everything a fourth generation Spartan has to truly be one.' The Captain approached a nearby surgery table and stripped off his uniform, leaving only his underwear on. He then proceeded to lie down on the surgery table where he was secured in place and multiple needles were directed towards him, along with a mask meant to inject sleeping gas into his lungs and provide a retinal surgery, to inject advanced Corneal Implants into his eyes.

'Captain, today you'll be getting Muscular Enhancement Lining, Pulmonary Polymer Lining, Corneal Implants and Cardiac Implants.' The CMO was preparing to direct the surgery single-handedly, but the Captain wanted to know what these augments would do to him.

'What do either of those enhancements give me?'

'The Muscular Enhancement Lining provides a strong, but flexible compound over the exterior of your muscles, allowing them to move at an increased rate and provide additional protection to your skeletal structure. Pulmonary Polymer Lining greatly increases your lung abilities and also lets you breathe in dangerous environments for about an hour or so. Corneal Implants will improve your perception and will allow your eyes to switch to night vision mode when everything gets dark. Really handy. Cardiac Implants will improve the capabilities of your heart, it will increase your heart rate maximum, letting larger amounts of adrenaline to safely pass through the bloodstream without any risk of a stroke or a heart attack. They can allow you to do everything faster.' The CMO explained everything however he could and noticed that the Captain was ready as he was not looking anywhere but upwards.

'I will inject sleeping gas into the mask and you will wake up in a few hours. The next surgery will be performed five hours after this one. Before you ask why so fast, it's because your brain is already used to augmentations already. It won't need the extra time to adaptation, but it will definitely need adaptation. In two or three weeks, the full results might kick in.' The Chief Medical Officer injected sleeping gas into the mask and the Spartan Captain immediately fell asleep. The CMO began the augmentation process, starting with injecting the biochemical compound meant for the muscle exterior.

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><p><strong>Citadel, Widow Nebula. 0056 hours by UTC.<br>\*\*Chris C-333 and John B-201 were walking among the large crowds at one of the five wards in the Citadel, scanning for Edward Terrence and Krilus Kroctus. Suddenly, Chris's datapad picked up a friendly biological signature one kilometer to the front.

'John, look at this.' Chris showed the datapad to his friend and 'partner-in-crime'.

'Hmâ€| directly ahead of us and by the detailâ€| he must be insideâ€| a strip club?' John immediately thought of Edward, because, with the little bit he knew about Tali, Edward and Krilus, Edward was the one who'd most likely go after girls.

'Edward.' Chris told first of what he thought and it seemed like they were thinking alike.

'What are we still doing here? Let's find him and then let's move onwards to finding the Turian.' John immediately ran off with Chris closely following him. Both of them were limiting their speed to the speed that normal Humans run so that it doesn't raise suspicion of genetically enhanced supersoldiers on the Citadel.

'Hey, watch it!'' An Asari civilian that was pushed aside by Chris expressed her discomfort with being shoved but the two undercover Spartan-III Headhunters didn't pay much attention as they kept running towards their destination.

After five minutes of running and shoving people aside, the Spartan-IIIs reached their target " the strip club in which Edward was most likely inside. They neared the club's entrance, acting as high-standing and rich gentlemen from the Alliance colonies.

'Show me your passes.' A bouncer at the entrance stood in front of the undercover Spartans. He seemed to be extremely muscular and the two Spartans looked at each other, seemingly exchanging thoughts on how to deal with him. Finally, John B-201 moved closer to him.

'Here they are!'' He passed out his hand and quickly grabbed the bouncer by his neck, crushing a few vital nerves, forcing him to pass out. 'bitch.' Slowly, John and Chris entered the club and noticed that it was enormous and had at least a thousand people in it, all from different races. Even a few that John or Chris didn't recognize, like the massive, brown, four legged creatures or the walking jellyfishes.

'This'll take a while. You scout out the private dance areas and I'll scope out the bar.' Chris wanted to grab a shot of some alien drinks that were being served even to Humans. John agreed with his plan, knowing that he'll most likely buy a drink with the fake credits that were transferred to his account just recently by Tanya. John slowly pulled up the sleeve on his left hand where his Tactical Datapad was located. He used it to trace the friendly biological signature and it lead him to the other end of the club. All he saw there was a wall.

'Dammit, it's a dead-end. Tanya, check the Cataclysm's sensors. They must be broken again.' John complained to Tanya but she verified the correction of the data.

'The sensors are not faulty. The data's one hundred percent correct.'

John B-201 began listening closely, differentiating the sounds of the crowds and the music of the club from anything suspicious using his augmentations. Suddenly, he heard someone getting beaten on the other side of the wall.

'Chris, I need a diversion!''

'On it.' Chris took a bottle of the finest wine available and raised it in the air while addressing the crowd. 'Everyone! The

finest alcohol on me!'' The crowd immediately cheered, raising their bottles and glasses in the air, waiting for the waitresses to bring them their so desired drinks. The cheers were loud enough for John B-201 to enact his plan. He raised his right hand in the air and clutched it into a fist, gathering strength into it. His hands were still plated in his Spartan armor, so additional fist protection was not a problem at all. He made a swift move forward with his fist, a powerful punch that tore down the wall and he used the opening in the wall to go through it. When he appeared on the other side, he saw Krilus getting beaten up by three Asari, one Human male and one alien that had four eyes in its head and in body shape resembled a Human.

''Where's the weapons cache, Krilus? We know you have it.'' The unknown alien demanded to know the location of a secret weapons cache.

''I don't know! I swear by the spirits!''

''Awâ€| did the little Turian shit his pants? All we need to know is the location of the nuclear weapons and that unknown ship.'' An asari tried seducing Krilus into giving away the location of an unknown ship. John immediately realized what were they talking about. The ship that Chris used to send Tali, Krilus and Edward back to this universe â€" a UNSC Prowler. He clutched both his hands into fists and entered the next room where the interrogation was in progress.

''Hey, assholes. You want a piece of me?'' John tore away his tuxedo, revealing his grey and green MJOLNIR MARK X [Forerunner] Powered Assault Armor that was underneath it all the time. The armor was based off of MJOLNIR MARK V for SPARTAN-IIIs, but after Chris and John were labeled MIA, they gained this armor.

''Ha! The Human wants to get his ass kicked! Get him, you sluts!'' The unknown alien was sure that it was a trivial task in front of him â€" to beat up this Human in heavy armor. He sent his three Asari forward and they all emitted blue bubbles of some unknown force. John skillfully dodged the first two but was caught in the third one, although nothing really happened, but one of the Asari was suffering from a massive migraine. This was most likely due to the extremely heavy armor that John was wearing. It weighed two to three times more than he did. John used this moment as an opportunity to strike her down and used his superior speed to approach the Asari mercenary and grab the her head.

''Let me go you filth!'' The Asari shouted and tried to scratch John's hand, but immediately after she stopped, she could feel enormous pressure being put on her head. He was crushing her skull!

''Fuck you.'' John replied with a very calm tone, before crushing the Asari's head, forcing it to explode and killing the Asari in an instant. It didn't need a lot of strength for him to perform such a feat. It inspired fear into the other four enemies that he still had to defeat. ''So, which one of you shitheads is next?'' John B-201 assumed a battle-ready stance, moving his right leg forward, pressing his left hand to his chest and moving his right hand out.

The only Human of the group lashed out and tried to punch the



Spartan. John B-201 deliberately avoided doing anything as he let the Human punch him. All the punch did was trigger his energy shields and deflected the punch. John B-201 immediately took the advantage and put two of his fingers on his right hand, the index finger and the middle finger, together, while stretching them out. He grabbed the Human with his left hand and stabbed his neck with his two fingers, crushing his breathing channels and forcing him to slowly die. He got tired of waiting and ran in the direction of the two Asari, stretching his hands out to the sides, ramming the Asari and throwing them forward into nearby walls. Immediately after slowing down, he ran to the side of the unknown alien who was firing his two pistols at the Spartan and punched his head off.

'Whoaâ€¦ I guess your head was barely holding on your shoulders.' The Headhunter retracted his hand and was feeling a lot better, knowing that he is a lot stronger than some of the races in this universe. 'Krilus, don't pass out on me.' John B-201 approached Krilus who was bleeding out and was tied to a chair. He quickly untied him and put him on his shoulder. 'We're getting you back aboard the Cataclysm, Krilus.' John was talking to the unconscious Turian on his shoulder, knowing that he was not awake.

'Hey John, I found Edward. He didn't seem in a very good shape. He was drunk as hell. I am waiting for you outside the club.' Chris informed that the last member of the team was found, surprising John B-201.

'That fast? I expected the quest to find the third member would be a rush across every star system of the Galaxy and would take a few monthsâ€¦' John quickly paced through the bar. 'â€¦ I guess I've been dreaming too much.' In a short moment, John B-201 left the bar and met up with Chris.

'The fuck have you been up to? You blew your cover.' Chris noticed that John B-201's tuxedo was missing.

'Oh? You haven't heard the gunshots? Well damn, you're a bad Spartan Headhunter. Now let's get back to the Cataclysm and slip away from the Citadel before they send a massive force after us.' John and Chris began to subtly move through the crowd to return back to their ship. Chris was holding Edward's hand to seemed literally too drunk to move by himself, so Chris was the babysitter. The crowd didn't seem to react to the Spartan in bulky armor at first, but when they finally noticed him, they moved aside. Every single person in the crowd gasped or was afraid to look in the Spartan's direction.

'Cowardsâ€¦' John B-201 whispered to himself upon seeing the expressions on the faces of the inhabitants of the Citadel.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>UNSC Infinite Dawn, Bridge Deck Medical Bay. 0501 hours by UTC.<br>\*\*Slowly waking up from his five hour sleep, John felt a bit strange. Suddenly, he remembered that he was augmented and received four out of seven augmentations. His muscles, lungs, eyes and his heart was augmented and he could feel the augments slowly kicking in over his old ones. He began experimenting, but when he tried to stand on his feet, he fell to the ground. His body was not yet entirely adapted to the newfound muscle strength.

'For fuck's sake' John cursed when he realized that he was lying on the floor. He slowly began to adapt to his new muscle strength and used his hands to push himself off the floor. He did it slowly so that the brain might analyze the information from the nerves and adapt to the new strength and even to his lungs, as it felt like he was inhaling more oxygen and releasing less of it. The lungs were processing a lot more oxygen, giving more energy for the muscles. He also felt his heartbeat pumping blood quite a bit faster and with greater force. This was better for the transportation of oxygen throughout the bloodstream across John's organs and especially the muscles, which were also augmented, allowing them to flex and strengthen a lot faster without the risk of breaking a bone. All he lacked was three vital Spartan-IV augmentations, one of which was the production of virtually indestructible bones. John feared that one the most, because, from what was declassified of ONI's Spartan-II augmentations, that augmentation was one of the most painful, but then he put his fear aside. John, after taking a look around, felt a better perception of his surroundings and how he could kill anyone in a lot of ways in the Medical Bay. This was because of the advanced Corneal Implants that were injected into the neurons responsible for his vision.

'SPARTAN Four project here. Nothing like that painful stuff in here.' He whispered to himself and slowly began getting up, giving his brain time to adapt, again. Suddenly, he heard a dog bark and his head, as if out of control, turned to face the door which was in a forty five degree angle to his left side. He was amazed at his increased reaction time as he turned his head into the direction of the source at the same time as it appeared. He approached the doors and opened them, only to find his and Rala's German Shepherd Dog jump on him and make him fall on the floor. Again. Rala was coming in right behind the dog, who was licking John's face over and over again. The dog was doing it out of love towards him.

'I bet you told him to do that when I'm still adapting to everything.'

'No' Rala answered and looked very sad. She still wasn't over the fact that her internal organ was massively damaged. She approached the surgery table upon which John spent five hours while getting augmented and she leaned on it.

'Rex, enough' John slowly and silently began to laugh at how ticklish the feeling from the dog's tongue was, but, after hearing John's command, the dog stepped aside and sat down on the floor as if it was trained.

'Hey, I didn't give him a name yet and it just took you one minute to figure that out?' Rala was impressed, but she quickly forgot what she was talking about as her worries overran her happiness.

'No, it's just that a friend of mine had a dog named Rex who was killed while he was visiting one of UNSC's outer colonies with it. I decided to name it in that dog's honor. He died because the Covenant soon invaded and wiped the planet out of existence in mere hours. Back then I thought the rebels wiped them out because the youth was kept in the dark from everyday life. Parents were forced to lie that the rebels had gained sufficient followers to begin wiping out UNSC colonies, and I found out the truth about the genocidal aliens only

shortly before my first assignment.'" John revealed the reasons behind the naming and went slightly too far, but soon got himself under control and returned back to reality as he got up on his feet again and slowly approached Rala while he looked slightly dizzy from her viewpoint. That was because of the adaptation process.

'Alrightâ€| Ralaâ€| I have a proposal for you, but I'd prefer to keep it a secret for you until I actually get my damn body under full control and stop walking like a drunkard who had way too many shots of vodka.'" John felt that he was gaining full control over his fists and his arms, so he tried to make straight punches as fast as he could. He was impressed at the speed he could generate with his fists as it was faster than any martial arts master could achieve. The SPARTAN-IV Program, in John's eyes, was a major success for Humanity to create cheap, reliable and extremely powerful supersoldiers that can outmatch the Sangheili on the field. Basically, Humanity's own force of 'Sangheili'.

Slowly, John moved his left hand over Rala's stomach again, trying to comfort her, making her know that John will always care about her. She wrapped her hands around John and quickly began hugging him. Or more precisely â€ squeezing him.

'Johnâ€| if he won't find a cureâ€| if he can't restart my full functionalityâ€| promise me that, whatever happensâ€|'" Rala was trying to decide the best thing for John to promise between avoiding to inform anyone of her infertility or to have John promise to somehow get a child once the both of them have matured enough to become parents. 'â€| Don't tell anyoneâ€| I don't want to be stripped of my honor!'" Rala hugged John even tighter, subtly appealing to his own sense of honor.

'I won't, Rala. I can't betray you, my love.'" John gave his promise that Rala knew he would uphold even if he would be tortured, slowly and with extreme pain. Even the dog barked to signify that his master, John Sandman, was telling the truth.

Unexpectedly, the Chief Medical Officer came inside the medical bay's surgery room writing something in his datapad. When he looked straight to the front and noticed Rala and John hugging, he wasn't surprised. He knew that both of them weren't in their top shapes.

'Ahem. Captain. Officer.'" The CMO informed the two of his presence and then looked down to his feet where he noticed a dog staring at him with its head slightly tilted. 'Would someone get the dog out of here? It's not the best place for a dog to be at because his fur can get into vital equipment.'"

'I'll do itâ€|'" Rala agreed to get the dog out and left the room, calling the dog to follow. 'Rex, follow me.'"

'Alright, now that we have some privacyâ€|'" The CMO raised his datapad. 'How are you feeling now, Captain?'"

'I'm getting adjusted to the new augmentations now, the change from the old ones to the new ones is going well but I still walk around like a drunkard.'"

'Very well. It seems that your body is adjusting well to the augmentations for now, but we still have three to implement into you. The ossification augmentation will not let you walk for a day, because your brain and muscles will have to adjust to the new and slightly heavier bones. Also, there's a message here from the High Council of Sanghelios saying that Spec Ops Officer Rala 'Thenam must be promoted to the rank of Zealot and that she must report in front of the Council within ten days.'

'Wellâ€¦ we'll deal with the Council later. Right now, I must keep my mind focused on adapting to the new augmentations. What sort of stuff is going to be grafted into me this time?' John lied down on the surgery table again and was prepared for the next operation.

'Well, Captain, the remaining three augmentations will be put into your organism. Carbide Ceramic Ossification will give you virtually unbreakable bones. Artificial Pancreas Implants will enhance your body's ability to extract maximum nutrition from food with minimal waste and the final augmentation, Artificial Platelet Injection, will enhance your body's ability to slow bleeding and clot your open wounds. It's basically like the regeneration ability for the reptiles, but it doesn't regrow lost limbs, sadly. A shame.' The CMO approached the computer that was responsible for the surgical robot arms that were now slowly approaching the Captain's body.

'You'll be put to sleep again, but this time I'll give you a double dose.' The CMO lowered the sleeping gas mask and, once it attached to Captain Sandman's face, it emitted the gas and the Captain quickly fell asleep. The Chief Medical Officer proceeded with the augmentations as he carefully placed each needle in position for the first augmentation, Carbide Ceramic Ossification, that will coat Captain Sandman's bones with ceramic material from the inside and the outside, but the Medical Officer needed to be extremely careful and place the needles in the correct areas, otherwise they will miss their target and coat the material in the wrong areas, causing significant problems.

After placing all the robotic arms with needles in the correct areas, with a bit of AI assistance, he pressed a button that began the process of augmentation, giving the AI â€" Jessica â€" full control of the process. The needles entered John's body and went past all the muscles straight to the skeletal structure, beginning to slowly and carefully drill inside the bones and spray advanced ceramic material over them.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>UNSC Cataclysm, Bridge. 0831 hours by UTC. In slipspace.<br>\*\*\*'Alright, we've got the entire team together. What now, Chris?' John approached the Commander who was deep in his own thoughts, but quickly joined back to the events in the real world.

'Well, we get Shepard, his team and begin investigating all this strange stuff in the other side of the Galaxy.' Chris's idea seemed easy, but he had to get passed Captain John and the chain of command first, which was not one of the easiest tasks ever.

'Don't forget that you need the clearance of your superior to

actually do something like that. We'll need to contact the Captain as soon as we enter the Caprica system.' Tanya chimed in, appearing over a nearby holo-tank.

'Yesâ€¦ thank you for remindingâ€¦' Chris felt tired of the chain of command, but everyone had to respect it and the power it wields.

'How long until we return to Caprica?'

'One hour and two minutes until we drop out of slipspace, Chris. I suggest you get some sleep or eat something. You look rather pale under that suit, even for someone who has lived in it for most of his life.' Tanya analyzed Chris's skin tone which was paler than normally, deciding that he hasn't eaten well in the last week.

'I willâ€¦ I will.' Tanya didn't seem convinced as Chris was still standing and pondering about the Collectors, so she asked for John B-201's help, who wrapped his hands around Chris's shoulders and dragged him away from the bridge to the nearby Wardroom.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>UNSC Infinite Dawn. Outside the Bridge Deck Medical Bay. 0931 hours by UTC.<br>Rala was sitting on a chair, with the German Shepherd Dog next to her, just outside the medical bay, patiently waiting for John's augmentations to end when suddenly she received a message from Jessica.

'Ma'am, we have a situation regarding your extremely private files.'

'What? What are you talking about?'

'The files regarding your infertility. Someone has sent them to someone on Sanghelios. I wasn't able to trace the sender or the receiver in time because I was busy with the adjustments to the targeting and navigation systems as well as monitoring the maintenance of the slipspace drive and the training of the soldiers in the Spartan Deck and also with Captain Sandman's augmentationsâ€¦ andâ€¦ some other things.'

'What?!' Rala jumped up on her feet in rage as she heard that someone has revealed her infertility from battle to someone on Sanghelios, but then she remembered who it could have been sent to.

'Yes. Do you have any idea to whom it could have been sent?'

'Yes, I do, but I need to consult with the Captain for that.'

'You're in luck. His augmentations are nearing the end, butâ€¦ ohâ€¦ he won't be awake for five more hours at least. I suggest you take a rest or find something to do. Captain Sandman has left his music player in his room. Perhaps you will find something interesting there, no?' Jessica gave Rala an interesting suggestion. If there was one thing Rala didn't know about John, then it's his entertainment preferences. She paced to the elevator which took her

one deck above and from it, she went to the front of the ship where the Captain's cabin was located.

When she entered the cabin, she noticed a datapad glowing, placed on a sofa to the left of where the entrance is. She approached it and picked it up, seeing a large list of Human 21st Century songs from various artists.

'Interestingâ€¦' She noticed the number of the songs. It was well over two hundred in the list and it was amazing for her to see so many songs for just one person. Finally, after minutes of reading the names of the songs and the authors, Rala finally decided to just listen to the music. She pressed the triangular arrow pointing to the right side that for Humans meant 'Play' and she began enjoying the music, while John is receiving his true Spartan-IV augmentations.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>UNSC Cataclysm, Wardroom, 0948 hours by UTC.<br>\*\*\*'Chris, I've tried contacting Captain Sandman, but only the Infinite Dawn's AI was responding, saying that he's being augmented.' Tanya informed Chris, who was eating breakfast with his Headhunter partner in the bridge deck's wardroom.

'What? Again? Didn't he receive ones already?' Chris literally spat his food out of his mouth when he heard of the second augmentations.

'No data available, Chris. I've taken the liberty to call Commander Shepard and his team aboard the Cataclysm and I have ordered the Normandy to be brought aboard as well and placed in Hangar L-2, opposite of Hangar L-1 in which the UNSC Dark Samurai is in.'

'Well thenâ€¦ forget asking the Captain for permission. Once they're aboard, make the slip toâ€¦ dammit. I don't know where.' Chris took a quick drink of beer from his bottle and began thinking where could the Cataclysm fly off to.

'Commander Shepard says that we should visit Omega station, in the Omega Nebula.'

'What the fuck is that thing?' Chris heard the name 'Omega station' for the first time and really wanted to know what it was and what was its purpose.

'From what the databases say, Omega station is the most lawless place in the Galaxy, housing thousands of criminals, prostitutes, mercenaries and others.' After Tanya gave a short description of Omega, John B-201 immediately stood up from his table.

'How many women?'

'A lot. Most of them are criminals.'

'Why aren't we on our way yet?' John B-201's sexual needs apparently had revived and he felt the need to find a girlâ€¦ or a dozen and just have a great time with them. Chris C-333 completely agreed with John B-201.

'Tanya, slip to Omega. Can't waste any more time.' Chris stood up too, leaving his food on the table and putting on his steel color MARK VI helmet with a golden visor.

'Already done. Tali'Zorah is also waiting for you at your personal cabin, Chris. I bet she's looking for some fun time.' Tanya's voice gave away a bit of her jealousy towards Tali.

'Someone's jealous. Ha.' John joked and quickly escaped from the Wardroom before Tanya would seal him in and demand an apology for that, but Tanya became unusually silent, leaving the two SPARTAN-III Headhunters alone for a while.

'Alright, Chris, I'll be in the bridge if you need me. Go ahead and have a great time with Tali.' John B-201 turned around and went for the bridge while Chris began walking towards the nearest elevator that would take him a few decks up to his personal cabin to meet Tali.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Sanghelios, State of Vadam, Vadam Keep's Kaidon Chamber, January 28<strong>\*\*\*th\*\*\*\*, 2554, 1229 hours by UTC.

><strong>Inside the great Vadam Keep that was located inside the Kolaar Mountain, high above the ground, a Sangheili Major who was secretly working undercover for the Covenant Remnant, was entering the Kaidon Chamber where the High Council of Sanghelios and the Kaidon of Vadam â€" Arbiter Thel 'Vadam â€" was located. The chamber itself was rather dark looking, with dark purple color schemes around the walls. The council was gathered around a large, square table with the Kaidon at the end of it, sitting on an elevated chair.

'My lord!' The undercover Sangheili agent bowed down before addressing the Arbiter with proof of inability that he recently received from an anonymous ally.

'Standâ€|' The Arbiter stood up and took a careful look over the Major. 'What do you want?'

'I have proof that one of the officers aboard the Human battlegroup currently out in the other universe has been infertile!' The Major put on a dramatic look and voice to make everyone believe that he's true and everyone else is wrong.

'What? This is preposterous! Rala 'Thenam has been a normal woman since birth!' One of the Councilors stood up immediately and looked angered by these accusations.

'Well, Councilor, will you refuse proof taken directly out of her bloodstream?' The Major dropped a UNSC medical-issue datapad on the table from which Rala's womb popped up and was colored in red, as in, useless, defunct.

'Infertileâ€| one of the finest warriorsâ€| we've been lied to all this time. That's why she didn't bond with youâ€|' The Arbiter gazed into the Major's eyes, trying to understand the secrets of Rala 'Thenam as he remembered that he, while he was Supreme Commander in the Covenant, was invited to attend to the marriage of this Sangheili Major and Officer Rala 'Thenam, the latter of which never appeared.

'We'll need to transfer her immediately back! We can't have our finest warrior stain the honor of the Special Operations units! Send a message to Captain Sandman to bring her back to Sanghelios!'

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Well... Captain Sandman wasn't really given SPARTAN-IV Augments in 2552, but was given enhanced SPARTAN-III ones... interesting.<br>Rala 'Thenam, a fine warrior of the Sangheili Special Operations, is about to be stripped of her rank, armor and position in the Sangheili Army and a spy has infiltrated the Vadam Keep... how will Rala and John get over this and how will they uncover the evil plots? Find out in the next chapter.\*\*

## 11. First Contact: Collectors

\*\*Hey all, bringing you something to read. Sorry for the rather long wait, I've had internet problems. So... let the reading begin, eh?

><strong>

\* \* \*

><p><strong>January 29th, 2185 (Alternate universe time), Sahrabarik System, UNSC Cataclysm's bridge, 0836 hours by UTC.<br>\*\*\*''There we are. The system that's labeled as the Sahrabarik system. Six thousand light years from Earthâ€| the most lawless place in the entire Galaxy.''' Tanya informed the bridge officers of their location while the blast shields of the bridge slowly opened from the slipspace travel.

''Six thousandâ€| that's not really that far, considering that our Galaxy is one hundred thousand light years in diameter. That means that Earth space should be threatened by pirate raids in this universe.''' John B-201 turned to face Commander Shepard and his small team that was standing right beside him.

''They've been raiding several of our Attican Traverse colonies. The Systems Alliance has its warships frequently patrol every system and engage in a fight if they're being raided.''' Shepard quickly responded to John's statement, letting him know that it's not that bad.

''Hmâ€| pirates must fear Humanity.''' Chris commented and put on his helmet, getting ready to board the station and for a long fight.

''We're going to approach the station in the Normandy, Commander. If you bring your ship any closer, it will raise suspicion and possibly dozens of light warships will attack.''' Commander Shepard didn't want to start a battle while they had an important mission of saving Humans in the Terminus systems.

''Wellâ€| I wouldn't say no to a good fight, butâ€| fine. We're going in stealthily.''' Chris agreed to prevent a fight and turned to Tanya. ''Stop the ship, Tanya, and be ready for a fight in case you're detected. Damage the pirate ships, don't destroy them entirely.''



'Alright, Chris, I'll try to keep the shit-stains of the Galaxy alive.'

'Good girl.' Chris, John, Shepard and his team consisting of the Turian, Garrus Vakarian and Tali'Zorah immediately left the bridge, heaving for Hangar Bay L-1 where the repaired Normandy SR-2 was docked. During the long walks across the huge hallways of the Cataclysm and the relatively fast descent with the elevator, they maintained silence, avoiding any talks or jokes.

Once they got aboard the Normandy SR-2, the hangar bay's doors opened up, letting the small scout frigate leave the massive Supercarrier and head for Omega. After travelling eight hundred thousand and seventy five kilometers to reach the station, the Normandy docked not far from the club that was called 'Afterlife' and the team left it, meeting three pirates who seemed to be ready to extort money for the 'safety' of the ship.

'Hey, you. You must be Commander Shepard. We're here to collect your security money and ensure theâ€| heheâ€| safetyâ€| of your vessel. Now, all we ask for is twenty thousand credits. No forgeries. Once you pay, we promise that we will keep a good eye over your ship.' The pirate leader, a Batarian wearing a dark green hardsuit with a helmet on, informed of his 'security payment.' Shepard refused.

'We don't need your security. Now get out of my way before I send my two friends over here to rip your heads directly off your shoulders and toss you awayâ€|'' Shepard turned to gaze into the blank visors of the two SPARTAN-III Headhunters. 'â€| laughing.'

'Ha! You think you're so tough?'' The Batarian raised his M-8 Avenger assault rifle, aiming it at the team. His two pirate friends did the same thing. Chris C-333 and John B-201 both approached them, covering the rest of the team with their bulky armor. Chris made the first move, grabbing the pirate leader and his friend to the left by their heads, while John punched the third one on the right, throwing him into a wall about fifty meters in front. The pirate died instantly due to cranial trauma and the damage to the spine. Chris wasn't so violent. He simply threw one pirate on the ground and snapped the leader's neck, letting the other one escape.

'And tell your friends to fuck off. If they ever appear, we'll really rip them apart.' Chris intimidated the fleeing pirate, inspiring true horror into him. The pirate kept falling while running away.

'Alrightâ€| we should go.' Shepard took the lead again, directing the team to Afterlife. The bouncers at the entrance didn't cause as much trouble as the pirates, so they stepped aside, letting Shepard and his team enter the club without having to wait in line. Once they passed the hallway that was filled with pirates and some asari dancers, they entered the upper section of the club Afterlife. They saw many Asari dancers dancing on the stage to the club music of upper Afterlife.

'I can never get tired of those dancers showing off their asses.' Garrus commented, remembering his days spent as a soldier known as 'Archangel'.

'If I touch at least one of them, will I get a few bullets shot at me?' Chris was trying to lighten up everyone's mood.

'A bit more than a few, judging by how many are armed with sidearm weapons.' John was observing everyone, using his advanced Heads-Up Display. The weapons were highlighted with a thin, blue outline on almost everyone except the Asari dancers.

'John. Chris. Stay close to me.' Shepard tried to get the SPARTAN-IIIs moving while he was passing by a bar in the club on his way towards the 'queen's throne'. When Shepard and his team approached the so-called 'Leader of Omega' Aria T'Loak, the guards didn't even try to stop them, seeing two tall and heavily armored Humans with them. Naturally, anyone could shit himself or herself and turn tail upon seeing these demons of Humanity that literally no one knew about.

'Shepardâ€¦ the Hero of Humanityâ€¦ and his company of friends. I see you brought Archangel and a Quarian along withâ€¦ hmâ€¦ those two I don't recognize.' Aria slightly tilted her head, trying to remember who they were, but it all was in vain. 'Do you two come from the Far Rim? Geth creations?'

John and Chris exchanged gazes with each other and then turned back to Aria to reply in unison. 'No.'

'Then who are you? I've never seen anyone like you before. I don't want strangers roaming around my station without any information of who they are.' Aria stood up from her comfortable sofa and flared blue from anger.

'My name's John B-201 and the ugly one behind me is Chris C-333. We're SPARTAN Three Headhunters and we're not from this universe. We are affiliated with a Human government known as the Unified Earth Government and we're directly serving its military, exploration and scientific branch â€” the United Nations Space Command. Now, if you want to get pissed and kill someone, don't try it on us. I've already turned three magicians to a pool of meat and blood on the Citadel.' John B-201 really did intimidate Aria, but only a tiny bit. No one can truly intimidate Aria T'Loak.

'Yeah. They're called 'biotics', Spartan. Get it right.' Aria sat down on her sofa, where Shepard had sat down comfortably. 'What do you want, Shepard?' Aria suddenly sounded cold, the usual cold, rough tone that she maintained.

'I've been off the grid for a while and I want to know where have the Collectors attacked.' Shepard responded, crossing his hands over his chest.

'Wellâ€¦ my sources say that they'll try to strike Horizon, but you might want to consult with your 'Illusive Man' for more details. I hear he knows everything.' Aria rudely responded, not wishing to give any more free information. She turned her head away as a signal that Shepard and his friends should leave.

Shepard got up and left immediately, but Chris lingered for a bit, showing Aria a sign that he is watching over her.

For the first time in her life, Aria felt scared to her very soul.

She didn't know who these two ''Spartans'' were, but she knew that they were not to be messed with.

Meanwhile, the team was leaving the club and heading right back for the Normandy SR-2. Aboard the Normandy, Shepard visited the briefing room where he was given a direct line to the Illusive Man who instructed Shepard to head out to Horizon. As Shepard came back to the bridge, or as the inhabitants of this universe call it â€" the ''Combat Information Center'' â€" he instructed his helmsman to head back to the UNSC Cataclysm while Chris instructed Tanya to spin up the slipspace drive for a travel towards a colony called ''Horizon''.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>UNSC Infinite Dawn's Medical Bay's Surgery Room, Caprica System. 1123 hours by UTC.<br>\*<strong>A long time after Captain Sandman's augmentations passed, he finally woke up, realizing what had happened the day before. When the Chief Medical Officer noticed the Captain waking from his prolonged slumber, he ran straight to his side to help him stand.

><strong><br>\*<strong>'Take it easy, Captain. You've endured the augmentations. Now you need to let your brain time to adapt to your new skeletal and muscular structure although it might take a few days.'

'No time, Doc. I've got stuff to do and places to be.' Captain Sandman freed himself from the CMO's helpful hands and began walking, looking even more drunk than after the first phase.

'The only place you are found in is the bridge and the only thing you do there is stare at your helmet and ignore the reports of your AI and the officers. I'd suggest you spend some more time in the medical bay, get used to your new self.'

'Nope.' Captain Sandman responded and, while struggling to walk straight and normal, reached his officer uniform, quickly putting it on and then heading for the exit. Upon exiting the surgery room and then the medical bay itself, he encountered a team of Elites consisting of three Minors and one Major, saluting to him.

'Shipmaster.' The Major greeted the Captain.

'At ease. Were you four waiting for me?' John asked, hearing the CMO come up from behind, from the medical bay, and then turning to face the group of five people.

'I ordered them to escort you in case you got outside the medical bay. Since you are out, they'll provide you escort until your brain adapts entirely. Of course some training won't hurt to help strengthen your increased muscle and bone mass.'

'Uh-huhâ€| any news while I was out, though?' Captain Sandman placed his hand on a nearby wall to help him keep the balance better and he observed the CMO digging through his files on the datapad.

'Yes, in fact, there are some news. The UNSC Supercarrier 'Cataclysm' had made a slipspace jump to a lawless place in the

Galaxy and your Sangheili right hand is very concerned about her private data.' The CMO lowered his datapad and was waiting for the Captain to dismiss him.

'Alright, thanks for the info, Doc. You can be dismissed.' The Chief Medical Officer acknowledged this dismiss and returned to work. He was one of two people trying to solve Rala's womb problem.

'You fourâ€¦ if you're going to stick close to me like flies over food, thenâ€¦ we'd better get going back to the bridge. I want to find out what has Chris been up to again.'

'Yes, Shipmaster!' The Elites bowed down and two of them approached Captain Sandman, pulling his hands over them, helping him move while the other two surrounded him from the front and the back, in a protective formation.

When John and his 'escort' arrived at the bridge, he was immediately greeted by his Spartan-IV Lieutenant, Alice Selina Taylor, although she did seem a bit envious of the Captain. John could tell it by her body language, the way her eyes moved and speed at which she saluted.

'Captain.' The Lieutenant saluted to the superior officer while the Elites slowly let go of him, letting him get more used to walking.

'Lieutenant. Where did the Cataclysm go to now?'

'Thisâ€¦ Omega station. The most lawless place in the whole Galaxyâ€¦ Apparently, they're looking for trouble.' The Captain turned to look at the holo-table after Lieutenant Taylor told what she knew, seeing Jessica staring at him.

'Where should we go, Captain?' Jessica was already spinning up the FTL drive as she knew that the Captain would want to go somewhere, but she didn't calculate the jump trajectory because no destination was given.

'Let's go to this Omega station. It'll take us two days to get there with our slipspace drive, right? Bring the Autumn-class Heavy Cruisers with us. I don't want to get our asses kicked by pirates.' The Captain approached his seat without the help of the Elites, but they still kept surrounding him, keeping him secure and not too far away in case he needs help.

'Aye, Captain. Signaling the \_Shield of Sparta\_ and the \_Warrior of Japan\_ for a coordinated jump to Omega.' Jessica immediately called the new heavy capital warships to the UNSC Infinite Dawn's side. The formation made a slipspace jump immediately when all airlocks and hangar bays were locked down and sealed tight from Cherenkov radiation that was produced upon the ship's transition into slipspace.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Horizon, Orbit, UNSC Cataclysm, 1934 hours by UTC.<br>\*<strong>Horizon. A tranquil colony world out in the Terminus, far away from Systems Alliance space and the Attican Traverse. From orbit, it looked very calm, undisturbed, until a large portal opened

and a massive five kilometer long Supercarrier emerged from it with the mini black hole closing right after.

'Chris, we've established low orbit around Horizon. I'm not detecting any radio chatter between the cities and there is someâ€| nasty buzzing sound in the southern hemisphere.' Tanya kept scanning the planet for any alerts and the southern hemisphere was the most disturbing. 'Planetary scans have revealed a medium tonnage starship, vertically landed, on the surface of one of the southern cities.'

'Then that's where our friends have landed. Shepard, gather your team. I'll send two Marine regiments down to kick ass and liberate the colony.' Chris took his helmet that was placed on the bridge's holo-table and left the post, heading for the nearest hangar while the ship's hallways lit up red and the alarm sounded off.

'All Marines, this is the AI speaking. Prepare for a combat situation with an unknown and a hostile enemy. Hazardous Operations outfit is a must. Bring extra ammo with you, because the enemy might have tough shields. All units, all units, rendezvous with your superiors, load up in dropships and prepare for a fight. All frigate crews, get ready for a planetary blockade. We will not let them escape from us.'

While the Marines were beginning their planetary invasion, Chris C-333, John B-201, Commander Shepard, Garrus and Tali along with fifteen Marines were heading down straight towards the location of the unidentified ship that Shepard immediately identified as the Collector Cruiser. The Pelican dropship landed them just outside the center of the small city. There, the passengers disembarked from the dropship and primed their weapons.

'Marines, stick close to us.' John B-201 rounded up the Marines behind him. The Marines were all dressed in their traditional green uniforms, but as an addition to the dangerous enemy, they were wearing a sealed variant of that armor that had a bit more armor plating on the body and they had a fully sealed helmet with a transparent visor. Most of the Marines were armed with MA5D Assault Rifles and M6G Magnum side-arms, but one was carrying a Squad Automatic Weapon with a SSR-41 MAV/AV 102 millimeter rocket launcher.

'Alrightâ€|'' Chris was trying to determine the quickest way inside the city and immediately found one. He marked it on his HUD. As he was leading the squad forward, they encountered the Collectors, bug-like humanoids, for the first time in person.

'Move, move, move! Get to cover, Marines!'' A Marine Sergeant shouted as he ran to nearby cover, behind a truck. He leaned around the corner to peek and noticed a Collector coming right up to him. He moved out of the corner and fired his MA5D, quickly emptying its clip and knocking the Collector to the ground, killing it.

'Ha! Their shields fall faster than the ones on an Elite Minor!'' The Sergeant cheered, but suddenly was shot in the gut. The round went straight through him and knocked him down to the ground. Another Marine came up to him, dragging him back behind the truck.

'Corpsman!' The Marine shouted for a medic as he took the Sergeant's place and opened fire on the Collectors. Meanwhile, while the Marines were dealing with the Collectors in a place filled with trucks, Chris and John were pulling stunt maneuvers on them, wiping the Collectors out with their Forerunner weapons that disintegrate enemies on kill. Chris was using dual Boltshots while John was holding an M395 DMR in one hand and a Boltshot in the other.

Soon after, the fight was over as the last Collector in the vicinity fell from the armor piercing rounds of an MA5D shot by a UNSC Marine.

'Marines, casualty report!' John B-201 approached the Corpsman who was attending the dead and wounded.

'Out of fifteen, two were killed and two were wounded, including the Sergeant.' The Corpsman reported with his African accent while injecting biofoam into the wounds of the Marines.

'Can you radio for evac?'

'Negative, Commander. Too much damn interference.' The Corpsman tried, in vain, to get a MEDIVAC Pelican to take the dead and wounded away.

Suddenly, Commander Shepard approached Commander John B-201 and he seemed to have good news with him.

'Spartan, perhaps we can secure the area up ahead and store our wounded there until your dropships arrive?' The option interested not just John and Chris, who was standing next to them, but also the Corpsman.

'Commander, we need someplace to store our wounded. That area that Commander Shepard was speaking about, I think there might be a few houses there.' After the Corpsman's plea, Chris C-333 looked up in the sky to notice a squadron of F-41 Broadwords make a strike on the Collector Cruiser, but fail as the ship's shields were far too strong for light weaponry to take them down.

'Alright, the faster we're done here, the better for us.'

\* \* \*

><p><strong>UNSC Infinite Dawn, Sahrabarik System, January 30<strong>\*\*\*\*, 2185 (Alternate universe time), 0001 hours by UTC.

><strong>'Shipmaster, wake up.' One of the Elite Minors surrounding Captain Sandman was trying to wake the latter up and after roughly thirty seconds of shaking the Spartan, his attempts met success.

'Whaâ€| are we there yet?'

'Yes, Captain, and faster than you anticipated. I took the liberty to transport us here faster using this universe's mass relay network. Don't worry, nobody saw our vessel.' Jessica was trying to calculate the workings of a mass relay after she acquired the intel on one.

'Good enough for me. Elites, uhâ€¦ let's get aboard that shithole, shall we?' John slowly got up and put his hand around one of his guards so that it might be easier for him to go around. The Elites and the Captain made their way towards the Spartan Deck first where John got his armor on. After that, they continued to the nearest hangar bay that contained a UNSC Sahara-class Heavy Prowler. They used that Prowler to head out to Omega station which was built in a mined out asteroid.

Their arrival to Omega was undisturbed as they arrived safely to the station. Mostly it was due to the fact that their stealth systems were engaged, but it was also because the ship had considerable armament to fend off an attack if needed. The Prowler docked right next to the club called 'Afterlife' where Shepard, Chris and John were a day before.

Once outside the Prowler and inside the docking area, the team met up with twenty pirates. The same pirates that threatened Shepard's team, but John and his Elites knew nothing of that.

'You there! Pay us a fee for security and we will let you pass safely!' The pirates tried extorting the cash out of Captain Sandman.

'You petty excuses for pirates. If I were you, I'd do the killing first and the talking later.' John pulled his katana out of its sheathe and primed his M6C for combat, aiming it at one of the Batarian pirates. 'Which one of you junior pirates is first?' John taunted the pirates and they snapped. The group of twenty pirates was being punched and slashed away by the Elites and their Type-1 Energy Swords. Captain Sandman didn't even have to move a muscle, despite his urge to do so. He sighed, holstering his weapons, and stepping over the dead bodies of the pirates. Once he left the docking area, he noticed the Afterlife club and above its entrance was a screen with an Asari dancer dancing.

John approached one of the bouncers at the front door with his Elites coming up from behind him.

'Have you seen two men dressed in armor similar in a way to mine, but the two being a bit shorter and brighter colored?' John asked the bouncer who immediately stepped aside.

'Those two went inside to visit Aria T'Loak. You'd better want to do the same too. She's inside the club on a balcony that no one can miss.' The bouncer opened the doors, letting John and his guards inside.

As the team entered the club, John began scanning for a balcony when he found one at his one o'clock. He immediately went up there, still limping like a drunk, and met with the Queen of Omega, as people call her.

'You must be one of thoseâ€¦ Spartans.' Aria spoke with her back facing the guest and his alien guards.

'Yeahâ€¦ have you see-' John wanted to ask about Chris and John, but he was interrupted when Aria confirmed his suspicions.

'Yes, the two Spartans were here, butâ€¦ you seeâ€¦ information is

going to cost you.'" Aria approached Captain Sandman and moved her hand across his chest armor and went around him, touching his shoulders. '"I want to see your face! I want to know how you look under that armor!'"

The Elites began talking with each other in silent as they approached the Captain closer, moving Aria back away from him. Aria did feel intimidated again, but she didn't let that show up.

'Alrightâ€|' John agreed to remove his helmet after a while of thought. He proceeded to remove his helmet, revealing his face to Aria. His short, dark brown hair, his hazel colored eyes and the scars on his face â€" one scar was running down the right side of his mouth and another was running across his nose.

Aria seemed surprised that it was a normal Human under that armor, despite his intimidating height â€" two meters and eight centimeters.

'You seem like a normal personâ€| what's so special about you?'" Aria maintained her normal tone of a 'royalty' aboard a station of criminals and then she saw a demonstration as the Spartan approached one of Aria's Batarian bodyguards and effortlessly lifted him off the ground and then let him fall on the ground. The Batarian was visibly angered and wanted to kill the Spartan, but Aria told him not to. Despite Aria's order, he raised his pistol but at instant his head was crushed by a punch from the Spartan.

Aria took a few steps back in fear, being intimidated by the effortless punch. She was afraid of these newcomers.

\_'The speed at which he killed one of my bodyguards wasâ€| by the Goddessâ€| it was faster than a bullet! And he didn't even put any effort into it!'" \_Aria spoke to herself in her mind, commenting on what she saw.

'Is that enough? Do I need to kill this station's entire population?'" John said, calmly, without any hint of anger. '"I'm a Spartan Four. An augmented super-soldier designed to be Humanity's best weapon against any threat. Designed as pure machines of war, we are smarter, stronger and faster than any normal Human. By a lot. Those of the perfect gene pool are at least ten times better.'" John referenced the SPARTAN-II Project candidates, all of whom were chosen from what seemed to be the 'perfect gene pool'. At least in his eyes they were the best from what he knew about them and he wanted to meet the surviving ones in person.

'Alrightâ€| Shepard and his team went to Horizon. There was a planned Collector attack there from what I know.'" Aria gave up the information, realizing that he might beat it out of her with little effort. Captain Sandman put his helmet back on and wiped the blood off of his hand, turning around and heading down the stairs and then for the exit with his four bodyguards.

'Should we spy on him, Aria?'" A Turian guard wanted to track the position of these newcomers and Aria seemed to agree, despite her inner fears of death by decapitation.

'Do it. Find where their lair, fort or base is. I don't care how, just find it.'" The Turian immediately ran off for a hangar bay where



his personal FTL-capable shuttle was stored. When the Captain and his crew left Omega, the Turian was hot on the trail, following them. Once the Captain's smaller ship docked with the more massive, five kilometer and six hundred meter long warship, it opened a micro-singularity and went right through it. The two other ships were preparing to do the same, but the Turian quickly ran into one of these singularities by landing on the surface of one of the two escort ships shortly before they left Sahrabarik system.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>January 30<strong>\*\*\*th\*\*\*\*, 0131 hours by UTC, 1531 hours by Local Time, Horizon.

><strong>'Commander, the planet is mostly secure. What's left is the city you're in. Reinforcements from other fronts are on their way.' A Marine Lieutenant informed his superior officer while he was flying by dropship to the southern hemisphere of the planet.

'Roger that, Lieutenant. We've still got one area to secure.' Chris acknowledged the report shortly before a large door in front of him opened and revealed a big field before him and the team. The field contained a few cars and colonial buildings and an antenna in the middle. An antenna with a control panel.

'Shepard, hook me into the control panel and I'll activate the defenses of the colony.' EDI, Shepard's ship's shackled AI, informed the Commander of the availability of defense activation and Shepard immediately ran for the panel, establishing a connection between it and the Normandy SR-2. Meanwhile, Chris C-333, John B-201, Tali'Zorah, Garrus and a squad of Marines were taking positions inside the trucks and arming their weapons, simply feeling that a battle is underway. They were right. As soon as Shepard hooked EDI into the system, swarms of undead, or 'husks' as they are called, ran out from the sides, trying to swarm the well-entrenched defenders. The Collectors were providing the suppressing fire from a distance, but they too were being picked off by the UNSC Marines armed with the MA5D Assault Rifles.

The fight against the husks and Collectors was short, but very bloody as after minutes, the ground was littered with dead bodies. Ninety eight percent of which were the 'undead' and Collectors. Some were UNSC Marines because they were dragged off and ripped apart. But the Marines didn't go down quietly. Even as their body parts were being ripped apart, they kept desperately struggling to free themselves, firing from their side-arm weapons or simply trying to kick the husks off. Some were successful, albeit returning without a limb or two.

'Commanderâ€¦ the undeadâ€¦ they're not coming anymore! We've won!'' A Marine Corporal raised his rifle in the air, cheering for a victory but far too soon. A new, and a massive thing appeared. It had a large 'mouth' containing many Human skulls and it had the shape of a bug, a fly, because it could fly with its wings. The massive thing landed on the ground with a loud shriek and a massive wave that knocked away some Marines that were closer to it.

'What the fuck is that thing?' Commander Chris asked, looking at Shepard, who, as Chris thought, knew what the Collectors had up their sleeve.

'I honestly don't know, but we have to kill it. And quick!' Shepard ran into cover, right beside the UNSC Marines and began firing his own rifle at the monster.

'Commander, I know how to deal with this motherfucker' A heavy gunner of the Marine unit took his SSR-41 MAV/AV 102mm rocket launcher and emptied its two tubes, firing rockets at the monster. They did a bit of damage and it required four more to take it down. Its skin was too thick for even anti-armor weapons and it had a biotic barrier that absorbed some of the kinetic energy directed at it.

'Do you still have the ammo for it?' John shouted, slowly putting a plan together.

'Yes, Sir. Still got eight rockets.' The Marine answered, loading two more rockets into the tubes of his anti-tank weapon.

'Pass me two rockets. I've got a plan!' The Marine immediately threw two rockets at the Commander without even questioning his plan, even if it was suicidal. John B-201 threw one rocket to Chris C-333 and dropped his empty M395 DMR on the ground.

'Ready to kill this thing, Chris?'

'You're still asking? Let's rock!' Chris and John vaulted over their cover and ran to the sides, avoiding the laser eye fire of the Collector monster and then quickly jumping on its spine, tearing its wings off with their immense strength.

'Now you can't fly!' Chris commented and primed his 102mm shaped charge for an explosion by pushing its back. John quickly did the same and they both leaned closer to the monster's mouth.

'Ready?' Chris asked, wanting to be sure if his partner-in-crime is ready for the execution of their 'epic' plan.

'Oorah.' John answered and the both of them threw their rockets inside the monster's mouth, quickly jumping away from it and then seeing its mouth being set on fire.

'Marines, open fire!' Chris gave a firing order and the Marines immediately unleashed a storm of lead upon the mortally wounded monster. The heavy gunner fired his anti-tank rocket launcher and instantly took down the Collector monster, saving the ammunition of his Marine comrades.

'Oorah, Marines! We kicked major ass! Out-fucking-standing!' John B-201 congratulated the Marines on a decisive victory against the Collectors. Shortly after the monster was taken down, the Collector warship fired its main thrusters and propelled skywards, leaving the planet, but two UNSC Strident-class Heavy Frigates were beginning to attempt an intercept. They fired two MAC shells altogether at the Collector ship's engines without effect. The warship accelerated to faster-than-light speeds and left the system.

'Commander Chris, this is the UNSC Molten Core. We failed to intercept and destroy the alien ship.'

'Copy that, Molten Core. Order the rest of the ships to regroup

around the Cataclysm and await further orders. I have a feeling that our fight has only begun.' Chris acknowledged the report and then noticed a Pelican descending from the sky with its troop bay's doors opening and revealing only two Marines onboard.

'Need a lift? We've delivered the wounded back up to the Cataclysm and the rest of the Marines have been transported back aboard too. Now what's left is you and your team.' A Marine Private approached the edge of the troop bay, speaking to Commander Chris.

'Rightâ€| back to the Cataclysm to discuss our next steps.'

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Caprica system, January 30<strong>\*\*th\*\*\*\*, 2112 hours by UTC.

><strong>'Captain, we're back in the Caprica system and I fear we were followed. A small, dropship-sized vessel has attached to the Shield of Sparta's portside plating.' Jessica popped up from the nearest holo-tank, informing the Captain of a significant security problem.

'Inform them of the problem and tell them to use their PDGs to push it away or destroy it.' John turned to face Jessica, waiting for her answer, but she simply nodded in acknowledgement, sending a message to the mentioned Autumn-class Heavy Cruiser. Moments later, Jessica activated a display in the frontal observation port which showed a zoomed in UNSC Shield of Sparta. More specifically, its portside section. The ship was firing its M910 50mm Rampart Point Defense Network System's batteries, trying to disable the vessel or force it to detach. It was successful. The shuttle was forced to leave and tried to escape, but a Howler missile from one of the five hundred UNSC Infinite Dawn's Howler missile pods utterly annihilated the shuttle, preventing it from escaping.

'Captainâ€| I fear that we were too late. That vessel sent out a signal, information that weights about five hundred gigabytes, to a nearby communications buoy. It contained information about us all. Ships, sizes, weapons and thousands of pictures. Our secrecy in this Galaxy is at risk.' Jessica failed her attempt to intercept the signal, but John didn't look as scared from that as the AI did.

'I think that we blew our secrecy the moment we set foot in this Galaxy. We should expect visitors soon, so order the Battlegroup to assume defensive positions around the Orbital Defense Grid. Meanwhile, we're going back to Sanghelios to settle one important thing.' John wanted to deliver Rala to Sanghelios to see what did the Council and the Arbiter want and to redeem her honor, if it was at stake.

While the UNSC Infinite Dawn was heading for the inter-universe slipspace portal, a lifepod was drifting in space with one occupant inside. The Turian that followed the three ships was in there and was alive and well. The pod kept drifting until a dropship arrived and used its magnets to attach the pod to it. The dropship began flying straight for one of the massive orbital defense stations.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Hey... hope you liked this chapter. I'll work on the next

one soon and I'll try not to keep you all waiting for far too long.<br>Anyways, I'm looking for a girl to chat with. XD  
>I know that right there sounds crazy but, the ones I have are getting a bit crazy and so on... so... if you're up for chatting with me, just PM me.<br>So, as usual, don't be shy or afraid to leave a review with your thoughts and have a nice day (Or nice days).\*\*

## 12. Finding Proof: Traitors In Our Midst

\*\*Hey all, sorry for the longer than usual wait. Hope you enjoy the chapter, even though it's not very action or romance-packed.

><strong>

\* \* \*

><p><strong>February 4th, 2554, 0645 hours by UTC. Sanghelios, Yermo, State of Vadam, Vadam Keep.<br>\*\*Inside the menacingly looking Vadam Keep, Rala 'Thenam, Captain Sandman and his personal SPARTAN-IV guard of eight Spartans were waiting outside the Kaidon's chamber to receive an audience with the Kaidon and the High Council of Sanghelios. Rala was nervous. So very nervous that she kept murmuring about losing her honor or even worse " being exiled from her clan and race.

'Rala, please, calm down. It can't be that bad.'" John tried calming his girlfriend down, to no avail. She kept pacing around, nervously, with the SPARTAN-IVs standing at attention every time she passes them by.

What really got everyone's attention came a minute later, when a member of the High Council of Sanghelios invited the Humans and Rala inside the Chamber. The group immediately stepped in, approaching a rather long table. Across the table, the Councilors were sitting on special chairs, talking with each other. When the Captain and his team entered the Chamber, they immediately turned their attention towards Rala 'Thenam.

Rala bowed down, showing respect to the Kaidon of the State of Vadam " Thel 'Vadam himself. The Captain, immediately noticing the untrustful gaze of the Council, did the same as Rala and knelt down, showing his respect. The SPARTAN-IVs did the same as their Captain.

'Please. Stand.'" The Kaidon spoke, letting the Humans and Rala stand up. They slowly stood up, with Rala stepping closer to the elongated table. She didn't allow John or any of the Spartans to approach her, because they had to stay at the sides. At least a dozen Elite Honor Guards came out of a nearby room, quite possibly the barracks, and stood by the sides of the SPARTANs, not letting them move.

'Special Operations Officer Rala 'Thenam" you have been diagnosed with infertility since birth. We value women highly, sparing them from the horrors of the front lines, with which they award us with a child, but you can award the men nothing. You are a disgrace to your own family, Rala, and your honor has been stained.'" The Kaidon spoke, trying to keep his tone neutral without anger or happiness.

Meanwhile, Captain Sandman was observing the Council, looking for who to 'convince' of defending Rala or who to intimidate to abstain from doing anything. He noticed three out of twelve Councilors were very angered. What John tried to understand now is what they were angered about - dishonoring Rala or her infertility.

'I have not been infertile since birth, your Majesty!' Rala tried to defend her honor, trying to imply that she has sustained a major wound during battle â€” the more honorable Sangheili way.

'We have proof that says otherwise. It was taken directly out of Shipmaster Sandman's ship's medical bay. Humans have far more advanced medical equipment than we have.'

When Thel 'Vadam mentioned UNSC Infinite Dawn's medical bay, he snapped out of his silence and brutally beat down the two Sangheili Honor Guards that were holding him in place.

'No one would dare to fabricate bullshit against Rala! She has loyally served both, the United Nations Space Command and the Sangheili! My Chief Medical Officer and his assistant in medical matters have both confirmed that it is a major battle wound!'

'But this proof couldn't have been constructed by a spy within your ship. We cannot operate Human equipment. It is too delicate and tooâ€¦ strange for us.' The Kaidon's words confirmed John's suspicions of a traitor onboard the UNSC Infinite Dawn and so the Captain retreated back into the middle of his Spartan group.

'Lieutenant.' John addressed his Spartan Officer â€” Lieutenant Alice Selina Taylor. 'I need you to find out who's the traitor on our ship. He might sabotage everything for us. Go, find him now.'

'I'll get it done, Captain.' Lieutenant Taylor immediately left the Chambers to head back outside of the Keep and to the nearest landing zone where a UNSC Pelican was landed.

While inside the Kaidon's chambers, the Council, the Kaidon and Rala were all arguing on the charges and Rala's fate. The Captain was just forced to wait in his place until the end of the meeting when the Humans and Rala were asked to leave the Chamber.

'It doesn't look good for meâ€¦ it just doesn't look good at all!'

Rala approached John and hugged him to find comfort. John embraced her as well, trying to calm her down.

'Lookâ€¦ all we need to do is get the real data back from the Infinite Dawn and find the spies.'

'But what if the honorless dog erased all the real files?'

'There's a heavy encryption on all files that I consider confidential, and that could deal a blow if given to the wrong hands. That encryption is known only by Jessica, but it can be bypassed with a verbal password for a short time. Short enough to make a copy on a portable data carrier. For your files, very few know the password.'

While John was trying to convince Rala that his ship's security precautions are always at maximum, the Arbiter and Kaidon himself came out of the chamber, approaching the two.

'Shipmaster Sandman, I must discuss a few things with you. Personally.' The Arbiter took a few steps back with the Captain following him. The Arbiter and the Captain went to a quiet place, further away from anyone who could listen in on their conversation.

'Captainâ€¦ I have a feeling that we may have spies working on both sides ever since the attempts to kill me and re-form the Covenant on Sanghelios. The spies on your side are feeding the spies here that have gained governmental favorâ€¦ secretly.' The Arbiter looked around, making sure that no one is nearby. To make sure that no one is cloaked, he swung his arm as if imitating that he is exercising it. 'If you find proof of a spy within our ranks, I will be able to single-handedly convince the council to spare Rala's honor, but expel her from the State until her problems are solved. The final decision on Rala's case will come in a few days. You've got enough time.' The Arbiter looked back into the Captain's eyes.

'I can do it, Arbiter. We'll find the bastard and we'll force the information out of him.' The Captain saluted to the Arbiter, returning to his group immediately, rallying them and returning to a landed Pelican dropship.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>UNSC Infinite Dawn's bridge deck medical bay. 0721 hours by UTC.<br>\*\*\* 'Wellâ€¦ spyâ€¦ you're smarter than I thought. You deleted the medical records of Rala 'Thenam. The Captain's going to tear him open for this.' Alice Taylor silently whispered to herself while trying to restore the deleted files using a backup hard drive that was guarded by a shield and firewall erected by the ship's AI â€œ Jessica. 'But, spy, you're not as smart because you forgot about backup files.' Taylor loaded in the backup files, copying them into the main memory system of the medical bay. She immediately had restored Rala 'Thenam's medical data, but one file was missing even from the backup data.

'The womb testsâ€¦' Taylor immediately began scanning the room, when she saw a red hologram of Jessica pop up over a holo-tank.

'I. WILL NOT. LET. YOU. SAVE THE ALIEN!' Jessica's rogue hologram began charging up with massive electric energy and Alice immediately ran out of the medical bay with the backup hard drive in her hands, rolling out through the doors in the nick of time, before the release of electric energy killed the lights in the medical bay. The lights came back to life soon after, because the wiring wasn't damaged at all and the light bulbs were just disabled for a short while.

'Jessica, acknowledge verbal restoration code: zero nine eight zero November alpha two six.' After Jessica's sudden rage burst, Taylor realized that someone had used the secret overload code on her. Someone who knew the ship's electronic systems was behind all this.

'Verbal code acknowledged and accepted. Restoring AI 0527-JSC to normal functionality.' Jessica acknowledged her own functionality restoration with her hologram returning to the normal blue color instead of the rampant red.

'Jessica, report.' Alice stood behind a corner right next to the door that she leaped out of before, leaning behind that corner to see if everything's alright.

'Yes, Lieutenant. Thank you for restoring me. I can personally confirm that we've a spy aboard our ship and he's definitely an agent for ONI under the direct command of Admiral Margaret Parangosky, the current Commander of ONI.' Jessica activated a nearby monitor, showing a recording of the order received by the spy aboard the Infinite Dawn.

'We need to cause some destruction between the decorated Captain John Sandman and the Sangheili. We must ensure that the Sangheili are never able to attack Humanity or anyone else ever again! This Sangheili girlfriend of his is an interesting option. Do everything you can to sabotage the Captain's 'good' relations with the Sangheili and you might even see the result â€" Human dominance in the Urs system. If you fail to sabotage the relationship then I've got a good friend on Sanghelios who will ensure that the Sangheili trigger an all-out war with Battlegroup Foxtrot, but you must ensure that the Humans win! At all times!' Admiral Margaret Parangosky was crazed with power that she had while being Commander of ONI. In the recording, she seemed calm while speaking of her dream â€" Human dominance over the aliens, but Alice could tell that she was crazy, psychopathic.

'Thisâ€¦ this idiot is crazy, Jessicaâ€¦ why destroy a potential ally?' Alice was trying to understand the reasons behind this. 'Sure, they tried to destroy our entire species, but that was a lie of the Prophets.'

'Records show that there was a similar mission in 2553. I've managed to hack into ONI's databases and I've found records of a Kilo Five team that created the rebel faction of the Sangheili. They wanted to destabilize their entire race then. Now they want to create a war with one of the most powerful Battlegroups â€" us. With this information, we can report to Fleet Admiral Hood and ask him to re-organize or completely destroy the Office of Naval Intelligence.

'I agree, but we have to find the traitor in our midst.'

'I think I have traced him to the secondary engine room on deck three hundred and twelve.'

'That was fast, Jessica. Thanks.' Alice immediately ran off, rallying a fireteam of UNSC Marines while on the way. Alice and the team ran in the elevator, heading down to deck 312. When they arrived down at the deck, they ran towards the back side of the warship, arriving at the secondary engine room. They took cover behind walls, next to the doors and primed their weapons. The UNSC Marine fireteam consisting of four Marines were carrying MA5D Assault Rifles while Lieutenant Alice Taylor was carrying dual M6H Handguns. One of the Marines proceeded to open the door by activating a passcode. The doors slid open and the team immediately went through them with Alice

at the front, entering a room filled with silent machinery, but three times smaller than the main engine room. They noticed that the room was almost empty, but Alice's helmet's motion sensor was picking up movement from a ''friendly'' target â€" a yellow dot. It was on the same level as they were.

''Marines, we have a target. Behind the small fuel tank.'' Alice pointed at a small fuel tank that had a radioactive sign on it. The fuel tank contained roughly one thousand liters of deuterium fuel used for feeding the main thermonuclear reactor or for refueling the Strident-class Heavy Frigates. The team divided into two parts to sneak around the fuel tank on both sides. Three Marines flanked around the left side while one Marine and Alice flanked around the right, with their rifles ready for a battle.

When they flanked around, they saw a Human male, slightly taller than the average. Alice recognized him as one of the NCOs, Petty Officer Second Class Jeremy Alexi Wilson, a Spartan-IV.

''Wilson? What the hell are you doing here? I thought I told you to train the platoon.'' Alice asked the PO2, but his response was only an evil grin. He quickly disarmed the three Marines behind him by kicking and punching their weapons from their hands and then punching them away from him. The Marine next to Alice tried to shoot him, but the Spartan's quick reflexes let him knock the Marine out unconscious, leaving Alice in a one on one against one of the finest Spartan-IVs on the ship. The two engaged in hand-to-hand combat, trying to punch each other, but block each other out at the same time. Alice tried to punch him right in the lungs, but her careless punch was blocked and turned against her as Wilson punched her in the face, causing her to stagger back and lose balance, falling on the ground. Wilson used this chance to run away to the nearest hangar bay and steal a FTL-capable ship, the only one being the Sahara-class Heavy Prowler stored more than a hundred decks above.

While Wilson was sneaking in the prowler, on the main hangar bay, Alice was regaining her balance after the successful knockdown and immediately ran outside the secondary engine room. She asked the nearby crew members of Wilson's location and they replied that he was running towards the elevator. Alice immediately figured out that Wilson was stealing Captain Sandman's personal prowler.

When Alice arrived in the main hangar bay, the prowler was already stolen and she could see that it performed a slipspace jump, but Wilson left behind his personal datapad that was in the hands of one of the engineers.

''Lieutenant! I found this on the floor! I believe it fell out of the Petty Officer's hands.'' The engineer handed the datapad to Lieutenant Taylor, who immediately took it off of the engineer's hands.

''Thank you, crewman. Return to your station.''

''The prowler was my station, ma'am.'' The engineer stood still in front of the Lieutenant while she was reading the datapad.

Petty Officer Second Class Jeremy A. Wilson,  
>I, Admiral Margaret Parangosky, am ordering you to prove your loyalty to the Human race and immediately send the acquired medical



records of Rala 'Thenam to our agent, Moro 'Vadam, on Sanghelios. He will present this proof to the Arbiter and so, the Arbiter will exile her, causing serious tensions between Captain Sandman and Sanghelios that might lead to war in certain ways that we cannot predict. Send the data within seventy two hours or we will consider you a traitor and strip you of your rank, prestige and will execute you.<em>

'Yeahâ€| more proof. The Captain would love getting his hands over this.' Alice whispered to herself and then felt an armored hand land on her shoulder. When she turned around, she found Captain John Sandman himself, clad in his MJOLNIR GEN2 armor, staring at her.

'Oh, I'd love to see what proof have you got, because I don't plan on waiting for too damn long to get my hands on that son of a bitch who stole a ship of mine and to gut that bitch leading ONI.' Alice handed Captain Sandman Wilson's datapad, containing the latest proof and her own, containing previous stuff. John proceeded to read the message in Wilson's datapad and noticed that there was an encrypted sentence in the post scriptum section.

'Jessica, can you decrypt this sentence?' John wanted to know if Jessica was capable of decrypting the message, to which Jessica immediately responded.

'I can, but it may take some time. It would be easier if I would get ONI's secret cyphers.' Jessica immediately began decrypting the sentence in Wilson's datapad, hacking open ONI's databases at the same time. Meanwhile, John turned to face Rala and the Spartan-IVs.

'Alright, Rala, we still have some time until the Council decides to give the final decision. By that time, Jessica will finish deciphering. Even faster, if all goes wellâ€|'' Jessica interrupted John in the middle of his speech.

'Captain, I've deciphered it.'

'The fuck?'

'Yes, Captain, I've managed to do so. It used the most basic UNSC decryption, Morse code and it contains the coordinates of â€| hmâ€| well, the portal, Captain. The message reads: 'Upon completion, you will head through the portal in the Oort cloud and hide on Earth in the other universe. There you will be safe, as the Captain would be forced to go to war if he would try to get to you in case of discovery.'

'Hmâ€| tricky. We'll get down to Sanghelios to present the proof tomorrow and await the decision of the council. Right now, we should get some rest. Goodnight, everyone.' John went through the crowd of Spartans, taking off his helmet in the process and looking at Rala who went by his side, following him to their cabin.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Well then, Captain John will have to engage with the Systems Alliance to get the traitor, it seems. I promise to you, readers, that the next chapter will have a bit more action and even a

Spartan vs. Spartan (Traitor) showdown. Thank you for reading and have a good daynight.

>Also... this comment is meant for 'aDarkOne' so... here it goes: Your opinions are always different so I can't really understand who are you leaning closer to: the ones who like love this story or the ones who dislike/hate the story. I'd like to see your opinions becoming a whole once. This isn't being said just by me, but a few good friends of mine (Who also happen to be followers of this story) claim this too.

><strong>

### 13. Defeating the Traitor

\*\*Hello everyone. As you all know, College is tiresome for me, but I still manage to work hard on the story so I made you all a new chapter to enjoy.

><strong>

\* \* \*

><p><strong>February 5th, 2554, Sanghelios, State of Vadam, Kaidon's Chambers.<br>\*\*''This proof is undeniable. Surely, this communication proof, coupled with the original medical data means that we must pardon Rala from our unjust charges.''' One of the Councilors, who actively supported Rala, rose up from his chair, speaking loudly and clearly to the rest of the Sangheili Council. Another Councilor slammed his fist against the table and rose up to address the supporter.

''Blasphemy! Human lies! They forged this to save a dishonorable member of our race!''

''Sit down. Let's not start a fight in front of Humans over who is right and who is wrong. We will vote. Everyone who thinks that Rala should be cleared of all charges, shout out a battle cry.''' The Arbiter spoke, standing up, his voice calm, but his eye-sight directed at Rala. The way he looked at her indicated that he was supporting her innocence. Out of the twenty councilors, fourteen, a majority, stood up and issued battle cries, showing their support for Rala 'Thenam.

The other six councilors simply stood up and left. They didn't even want to vote because they thought that this decision didn't follow traditions "traditions that were established thousands of years ago where infertiles were cast out from society, no matter how they got their infertility.

''Then, by the powers that the Council grants me at this moment, I hereby announce Rala 'Thenam innocent and lift all charges against her. We can now return to our more important tasks.''' The Arbiter announced and stepped off his throne-like spot, moving closer to Rala and John who were standing at the far side of the Chamber, near the exit.

''As a token of our appreciation for helping us resolve the matter faster and see the truth, we offer some of our ships and scavenged Forerunner technology to you, Shipmaster. Use them wisely.''

''Thank you, Arbiter. I promise you, your gifts to the Battlegroup

will not be used up in vain.'' The Captain bowed down before the Arbiter and quickly stood back up, leaving the chambers with his team and Rala, returning back to the Infinite Dawn which was hovering above the planet and now surrounded by one relatively small CAS-class Assault Carrier which was roughly five kilometers in length, and also supported by six CCS-class Battlecruisers. Upon the Captain's and his team's arrival, the ships immediately jumped to slipspace to return to the location of the rest of the Battlegroup â€" the other universe.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>UNSC Cataclysm, nearing the Valhallan Threshold, 2185 (Local Calendar), 0745 hours by UTC, February 6<strong>\*\*th\*\*\*\*.

><strong>'Chrisâ€| thank you for offering your assistance. My father is very important to me.' Tali thanked the SPARTAN-III Commander, keeping at a distance of five meters from him on the bridge.

'You're welcome. Perhaps we may find something important that could help us counter these Collectors.' Chris sounded rather optimistic, hoping to find information among Tali's father's files. If, of course, she or her father allows him digging through all that. If not, he always has a backup plan and in this case it was Tanya.

'Commander, we're dropping out of slipspace in ten seconds. Prepare for contact.'

'Copy that. Open the blast shields and activate the energy shielding.'

'Roger that, Sir. Activating shields and opening the blast shields.'

The UNSC Cataclysm's window blast shields began slowly opening as the ship itself was nearing its destination. While travelling in slipspace, a small hole at the end of the slipstream space appeared, right in front of the Cataclysm. That hole was the portal that the Cataclysm used to leave slipspace and arrive in normal space, right in front of a few thousand quarian vessels.

'Commander, scans indicate that the quarian ships are priming their weapons for an immediate frontal salvo. Estimated damage to hull is none, estimated damage to shields â€" two to three percent.' Tanya was calculating the approximate damage from the point-defense guns of the quarian fleet, assuming that they are as strong as the 70mm point-defense guns used on UNSC's largest ships, like the Infinity-class or the Cataclysm-class, as the UNSC Cataclysm's class is now called.

'The quarians are not firing. Also, there is an incoming communications signal from one of the three largest ships of their fleet. They call it the Rayya.'

'Put it through, Tanya.' Chris was ready to talk with the quarians face-to-face, but when they responded and a video communications channel was established, they had their masks on instead. Chris was disappointed.

'Human. What is the purpose of your presence in this system?' A quarian male Admiral who Tali identified as Han'Gerrel vas Neema, addressed the Commander of the Cataclysm.

'I'm Chris, Commander of the Cataclysm. I came here to investigate whatever happened to Tali'Zorah's father. I've got Tali'Zorah right here with me, if you wish to talk to her.'

'There is no need. If you have come here to investigate the incident that has happened aboard one of our ships then feel welcome, but do remember that we'll be keeping an eye on you and the faintest scent of betrayal will result in the destruction of you and your ship.'

'Rightâ€|'' Chris turned around with the video comms ending and then silently muttered something. 'â€|asshole.'

'You know, if you were John, I think he'd annihilate half of their fleet for anything like that.' John B-201 implied about Captain Sandman's defensive nature and that he doesn't take threats lightly.

'That's why he's not here. We can't risk annihilating an almost extinct species or we're no better than the Covenant that we fought so valiantly against.'

'Yeah, true, but I guess if he knew that, he'd limit the destruction to just moderate damage to a single ship. He loves to blow stuff up.'

'Everyone loves some fireworks. The bigger the better. Now let's get aboard the Rayya before the quarians decide that we're liabilities.' Chris put his helmet on his head and sealed his suit tight. John B-201 did the same as the two of them were getting ready for some politics and action. Most preferably the latter instead of the former.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Caprica's orbit, 1101 hours by UTC, 2554 (UNSC Calendar), 2185 (Local Calendar)<strong>

>'Captain, reports are coming in confirming that your personal prowler was here. It made an instant slipspace jump to Earth the moment it was discovered.' Jessica gave information about the Sahara-class heavy prowler that the traitorous SPARTAN-IV used to escape custody.<p>

'Assemble the Battlegroup. Now!' John wanted to capture the traitor as soon as it was possible, and with the new ships at the fleet's disposal, a small prowler wouldn't even be able to slip by them.

'Aye. The Battlegroup is assembling right around us, Captain.'

'Tell them to spin up FTL drives and head for Earth.'

'The travel to Earth will take us approximately thirty minutes andâ€| alright. I've sent a message to every ship. They're already

commencing the slipspace jumps.'' Jessica's hologram disappeared from the holo-tank on the bridge and she began charging up the Infinite Dawn's slipspace drive while the Battlegroup was already jumping to Earth.

''Jessica, make sure that the Battlegroup doesn't start a war by accident. I'll be in my quarters with Rala. Once we're about to drop out of slipspace, inform me.'' John left the bridge, leaving Jessica in charge of the Battlegroup.

''Aye, Captain.''

Captain Sandman made his way towards his personal cabin and upon entering it, she noticed that Rala was infuriated. Bashing and hitting almost everything in her way. Apparently, it was a Sangheili way of blowing some steam. At least, it was in John's eyes.

''Rala, what's wrong? You seemed perfectly calm a few minutes ago and now this? You're throwing stuff aroundâ€|''

''Wellâ€| these damned traitors and the office of intelligence! Why? Why are they doing this?''

''Rala, traitors have existed since the dawn of life. They think that by betraying their cause, by stabbing their friends and allies in the back, they will reach the peak of life â€" infinite wealth, great respect and limitless power. Power over others. In reality, they're nothing but a bunch of sore losers that can't do anything right, so they develop a need to betray. Don't worry about them. When I'll be done interrogating the traitorous Human, you can tear him apart later on.'' John gave a lecture to Rala of how he understood traitors and promised to give Rala the Human traitor, even though tearing the traitorous Spartan would be very difficult.

''Wellâ€| at least that's partially calming.''

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Alarei, Valhallan Threshold, 2185 (Local Calendar), 1124 hours by UTC.<br>\*<strong>Aboard the quarian research vessel ''Alarei'' the team consisting of Chris C-333, John B-201 and Tali'Zorah made significant progress towards the core of the vessel by blasting through waves of Geth. They were pinned down just two dozen meters from the core by a squad of Geth that seemed to have adapted to their tactics and concentrated their fire on the SPARTANS.

><strong><br>\*<strong>''These things are smarter than I thought. They're using advanced tactics to try and beat us.'' Chris commented on Geth military strategies because he and his team consisting of Tali and John B-201 were pinned behind cover.

''You don't say. Their damage to our shields is about half of the Covenant plasma weapons so we have extra time that we can spend under fire.'' John B-201 leaned out of cover and began picking off Geth with impressive headshots from his M395 Designated Marksman Rifle. Chris rose out of cover as well, firing his dual-wielded Boltshot pistols.

''These things are falling faster than Grunts armed with theirâ€| uhâ€| major armor?''

'Or Elites in minor armor.' The two SPARTANs commented on the weakness of Geth armor, but when they saw a Geth Prime emerge out of a nearby room, they immediately ran for cover.

'Damn that shitstain's big.' John commented on the Geth Prime's size while hiding behind a wall.

'Hey, John, remember the old saying: 'The bigger they areâ€¦|''

'â€¦|the harder they fall.' Let's kick ass, Chris!'' John pulled a pin off a frag grenade and he tossed the grenade around the corner. The grenade slipped a bit past the Geth Prime but it exploded behind him, sending small steel balls right into its back, hitting the shields and weakening them. The two SPARTAN-III Headhunters rolled out of cover and sent bullets and hard-light projectiles straight into every possible area of the Geth Prime's body, killing it quickly.

'Ha! Owned!'' Chris approached the lifeless body of the Prime and poked it with his leg to see if it was still mobile.

'Father!'' Tali ran past the two SPARTANs when she saw a dead quarian body on the ground with an enviro-suit that matched her father's.

'Father! No!'' Tali took the dead body of her father in her hands and hugged it, hoping to hear the last words of her father showing his fatherly love towards his daughter. Tali was silently whispering to her father, hoping that he might still be alive.

Tanya, while using Chris's helmet to scan the quarian male's body, determined that he is dead. She determined that by seeing the lack of cardiovascular activity and no neural activity. Chris could see Rael'Zorah's body being outlined through his HUD and his heart was shown to be inactive â€" no pulse was detected.

'Tali, he's dead.' Chris tried to inform Tali of the reality. The cruel reality.

'No! No! He can't be dead! He-he always had a backup plan! An onboard medical stasis program orâ€¦| or something!'' Tali tried to negate the reality, but the more she tried to do that, the more her tears began flowing down from her eyes. Chris knelt down, closer to Tali, and slowly removed her hands from Rael's dead body.

Tali quickly moved her arms around the bulky powered assault armor that Chris wore. She was hugging him while letting her emotions out.

'It's alright Tali. You'll be fine.' While Tali was crying, Chris made a gesture for John to scout out the next room. The SPARTAN-III Headhunter went into the next room where he encountered a Geth Hunter that immediately spotted him and activated its cloak.

'This son of a bitch has got a cloak!'' John shouted out so that Chris might hear, but Chris didn't release Tali. Instead, he held on to her tighter, hoping to protect her in case the Hunter gets past his partner in crime.

John began relying on his motion sensor when it detected a hostile unit moving close to him. When it got within melee range, John immediately swung his fist in its direction, making a direct hit.

'Gotcha!' John immediately picked the Hunter up and smashed it into a nearby wall using his Spartan strength. Once the Hunter was released on the ground, John grabbed it once again and smashed it some more until nothing was left of its head and the upper torso. 'And stay down!' After smashing the Geth Hunter to pieces, John approached the memory core where information of Rael'Zorah's experiments on the Geth was stored. He could hear Chris and Tali behind him and stepped aside.

'John, can you please leave us alone for a minute?' Chris asked to be left alone with Tali and John B-201 complied, leaving the room and heading back to the shuttle that they used to reach the Alarei from the Rayya.

'Tali, this information is very critical. As far as I actually understood, your father may be labeled as a criminal and exiled from the fleet, but you will be pardoned for your father's crimes. What will you decide to do?' Chris wanted to hear Tali's decision on the matter. While Tali was thinking, John B-201 informed Chris of a new situation.

'Hey, Chris, Battlegroup Foxtrot has surrounded Earth and are standing off against the Alliance. I guess Captain Sandman's decided to reveal us all to the galaxy.'

'Chris, we can't reveal this!'

'But I don't know of any other way to help you! You have to sacrifice something!' Chris couldn't protect Tali as he didn't know much about her and so, Tali decided to show the data of Rael's experiments to the Admiralty Board.

'Let's go, Chris. We have to return to your Battlegroup as soon as we can.'

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Ten minutes later, aboard the Rayya.<br>\*\*After showing the data on Rael's experiments on the Geth, the Admiralty Board exiled him, posthumously, and pardoned Tali, lifting all charges against her. After the meeting of the Board, Admiral Xen was interested in joining up with Tali and the 'new' Humans.

'Tali, if you don't mind me askingâ€¦ can I join your crew?'

Tali gazed at Chris, hoping to get an answer from him, but Chris answered to Xen instead.

'Well, Admiral, you'll have to take it up with Captain Sandman. He manages all the alien arrivals within the Battlegroup. Also, many of our veterans have a dislike for aliens because of an all too recent war for Human survival. It's not easy for them to accept the fact that we're part of the galactic community now that Humanity grew from being a mouse to a galactic superpower.' Chris explained and then

stared into Daro'Xen's visor, seeing her eyes sparkle with hope to get aboard the ship and just explore new technology.

'I'm pretty sure Captain Sandman would require someone adept in science. Welcome aboard the Cataclysm.'

Chris, John, Tali and the new crew-member " Admiral Daro'Xen vas Moreh " departed the Rayya on the Supercarrier/warship hybrid " the UNSC Cataclysm " and made an immediate slipspace jump for the nearest mass relay to get to Earth as soon as possible.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Earth, Systems Alliance space, 2185 (Local Calendar), 1206 hours by UTC.<br>\*\*UNSC Battlegroup Foxtrot had arrived at Earth orbit roughly two minutes ago where it encountered a defensive force of about fifty ships. From the intercepted communications, fifty more were on the way. The crew of the UNSC Infinite Dawn immediately understood that fifty warships was the size of a fleet in this universe. On the bridge of the Infinite Dawn, Captain Sandman was trying to establish a comms channel with whoever was leading the fleet blocking UNSC's access to Earth.

'Captain, we've identified the flagship. It's approximately eight nine hundred and fifty two meters long sporting a single spinal cannon of unknown type and dozens of broadside cannons. Possibly similar to ours. Its middle section is a bit more longer than the other ship types.' Jessica informed of what she's accomplished up to the current moment.

'Have you created a channel with that ship?' John approached the holo-table, looking at a 3D model of the ship that Jessica described. It had a mainly white hull with dark blue stripes running across its lower sections with an unknown symbol on the sides.

'Yes, Captain. I've managed to open a video communications channel with them. Strangely enough, they utilize holographic video communications as their primary communications type.' Jessica immediately opened a communications channel with the apparent flagship of the local Human fleet. John approached the large monitor at the back of the bridge where he was awaiting to see the face of the commander of the local Humans.

'Unknown ship, this is the Systems Alliance Space Vehicle Orizaba. Please acknowledge.' The message was largely garbled and Jessica tried compensating by adjusting the radio waves and managed to get a crystal clear signal. Captain Sandman got to see the face of his enemy that he hoped to befriend " it was an elderly Human, probably in his late forties or early fifties, wearing officer's dress blues and a cap with the same symbol as the one on the sides of his ship. The Admiral also had grey hair.

'This is Captain John Sandman of the United Nations Space Command Starship Infinite Dawn. I read you loud and clear.'

'Captain, my name is Steven Hackett. I'm an Admiral, head of Systems Alliance Navy. I'd like to know where the hell do you come from and what the hell do you want from Earth?'

'There is a dangerous fugitive hiding on Earth in this universe and



our mission is to capture him by force. He has betrayed his oath to Humanity, he has betrayed our trust and worked to sabotage the hard-earned relations with an alien species. We demand that you let us pass.'

'I'm sorry, but I can't let you until you tell me who the hell are you?'

'Alright, Admiral we come from an alternate universe. Does that suit you?'

'Alternate what? How is this possible?'

'You don't have the means to travel between universes we can travel utilizing upgraded faster-than-light drives. Ours. That are a lot different from your inferior ones. We can get to know each other better later. Right now there is a traitor on Earth and we need to find him before he destroys something! Admiral, that traitor is heavily augmented and he poses a threat to the lives of your people!'

'I don't know what's real and what's not'  
Admiral Steven Hackett was having a hard time processing all the information.

'Admiral, the only thing you can do right now is let us through. All we need to do is find that traitor and lock him up.'

'Technically, he's on our soil so he should be judged by our laws, should he not? Or do we not share the same laws?'

'We're both democratic governments, but he committed crimes against us, not you, therefore he must be judged onboard our ship!'

'I You won't be destroying or trying to conquer anything, will you?'

'No, Admiral, we're not here to conquer. We're here to explore and establish diplomacy. I promise we'll remove our presence from the planet as soon as we get that son of a bitch back aboard our ship.'

'Alright you may land, but I'll be carefully watching over all your steps.' Admiral Hackett finally ordered his ships to move aside, clearing a path for the UNSC's vessels to New York City because apparently that's where the traitor had hidden the Sahara-class Heavy Prowler's signal was emanating from the outskirts of New York City, near the countryside.

'Rala, you have control of the Battlegroup. If this 'Alliance' fleet makes one wrong move by charging up its weapons and firing at our ships, wipe it out. I authorize you to use the thermonuclear arsenal if you must.'

As Captain Sandman and a platoon of Jaeger Company under the command of Lieutenant Taylor made their way to the surface, Rala assumed command of the Battlegroup, carefully watching the ships of the Alliance that were shown on the holo-table. Jessica even marked the locations of their weapons with tiny red dots. There were quite a lot of batteries. Infrared light batteries.

When Captain Sandman and 1st Platoon of Jaeger Company reached Earth, they landed right next to the Sahara-class Prowler. John assigned two members of the platoon to get the ship back aboard the Infinite Dawn where it belongs.

'All units, spread out and search for Petty Officer Jeremy Wilson. Beware that he IS a SPARTAN-IV. Most likely brainwashed. Report to all other units once you find him. Spread out in teams of two. Taylor, with me.' Captain Sandman and Lieutenant Taylor took their route west of the city, further into the countryside.

'I hope none of the locals saw our descentâ€¦ but hey, their version of New York City seems almost identical to oursâ€¦ except that ours is three times larger and has skyscrapers two times higher than theseâ€¦' Taylor was weary of being seen by the local Humans. Her worries had a reason â€” if the SPARTANs were seen, it might cause chaos because it's in Human nature to be afraid of the unknown.

'I hope so too, butâ€¦ GET DOWN!' Captain Sandman jumped right into Taylor's body, tackling her out of the way of a missile. 'That was a rocket launcher! It's him alright!' Captain Sandman raised his arm to the location of the helmet's communicator and contacted the rest of the platoon.

'First Platoon, rally on me. I've found the traitor.' After giving out the order to the rest of the platoon, he put Taylor's body on the ground and began running straight into the direction of the traitorous Spartan-IV. Once he reached the Spartan-IV, he rammed a fist right into his face, but it couldn't do much damage because the traitor was clad in light blue Warrior armor, although it did lower his energy shields.

Meanwhile, aboard the Infinite Dawn's bridge, Jessica began feeding Rala with reports of what she saw through John's live helmet-camera.

'Rala, Captain Sandman has engaged in hand-to-hand combat with Petty Officer Wilson. The outcome is unknown yet, because both are SPARTAN-IVs and both have some certain experience. Also, the Cataclysm recently arrived and is now taking formation in the Battlegroup. I've sent them a situational report already.'

'Thank you, Jessicaâ€¦' Rala turned her gaze away from the holo-table and looked at the monitor where John's helmet camera's live-feed was shown. Both Spartans were exchanging punches and difficult moves with each other and it appeared as though Wilson had the upper hand.

John was punched into the stomach and then a right hook hit his face, forcing him to fly down to the ground, but just before touching the ground, he recovered and performed a backflip to get back on his feet. He was trying to keep his mind free of all thoughts, but his inner fury was barely being held back. His fury was building up because Wilson betrayed the Battlegroup by working with ONI's crazy Commanding Officer.

'Sandman, you'll never defeat me. I'm not a mere Spartan Four. I'm an enhanced one. I'm stronger, more durable, faster and smarter than you or any other Spartan in existence is.' Wilson began speaking,

claiming that he is better than any Human, augmented or not.

'There is one none of us will ever best.' John tried to counter Wilson's argument by indirectly referencing Sierra-117, the best of the SPARTAN-IIs.

'Sierra-117 is nothing compared to me! He is dead. I am alive.'

'You're the dead man walking. Sierra-117 is one of the few truly missing in action, because without a body we can't make a real decision.' John reached for his Katana and pulled it out of its sheath, letting the sun's rays sparkle off from the shiny, yet deadly blade of the ancient Samurai sword.

'Your tiny dagger won't do anything to my armor!' Wilson's over-confidence told him that he was invulnerable to the best sword of Humanity, but when John attacked and made a triple slash across Wilson's chest, he felt that he was bleeding and that his chest piece was rendered useless. John regained the upper hand and quickly gathered his strength, readying himself for a jump across Wilson. John jumped as far as he could and landed right behind the traitorous Spartan-IV, with his fury taking a grip of his senses.

Captain Sandman stabbed Wilson straight through the heart from the back and he slashed the sword outwards, cutting open Wilson's body that the traitor claimed was invulnerable. The blood from the Spartan-IV's body stained Captain Sandman's golden visor and black armor.

Wilson slowly turned around, still ready for a fight and grabbed Sandman by his chest piece, throwing him fifty meters away. Upon landing, John used his sword to help him get up. After getting back on his feet, John went completely silent as his fury had taken him completely over. Both Spartans simply stood at their positions until Sandman issued a loud battle cry and charged at Wilson with the tip of his Katana aimed forward, straight at Wilson's head. Wilson wanted to trick the Captain in believing that he has won and at the last moment he attempted to jump aside, but he forgot that Captain Sandman was also a SPARTAN-IV. The advanced reaction allowed Captain Sandman to change his strategy from charging head-on to making a swift slash to the side. He managed to cut off Wilson's head cleanly off of the shoulders. As he retracted his blade to his side, blood began dripping from the tip of the blade.

The lifeless body of Petty Officer Jeremy A. Wilson fell on the ground while Captain Sandman sheathed his Katana and turned his back on it, returning to Lieutenant Taylor's position where the rest of the Spartan Platoon had gathered.

'Call for evacâ€¦ we're getting out of hereâ€¦'

\* \* \*

><p><strong>UNSC Infinite Dawn, 1654 hours by UTC, 2185 (Local Calendar).<br>\*\*Admiral Steven Hackett and a large group of Alliance's diplomats and Marines had arrived aboard one of the UNSC Infinite Dawn's largest hangars for official diplomacy, talking with representatives of the UNSC and Sangheili.

Alliance's diplomats were carefully cataloguing all the unclassified information of the UNSC and Sangheili into the Galactic Codex that would be released to the larger public and the Alliance News Network. Eventually, the diplomatic staff moved from the hangar to the hallways, beginning to explore the massive starship.

'Are you sure it was such a good idea to reveal ourselves?' Chris asked Captain Sandman about his decision through a holographic communicator in the Captain's Quarters where Admiral Hood and the Arbiter himself was present.

'It was time to reveal ourselves. No longer could we keep ourselves a secret, Chris. Sooner or later we would've had to emerge from the shadows. It was also thanks to your actions that accelerated our process of appearing on the galactic stage.'

'I completely support Captain Sandman in this matter. His decision required a great deal of thought, as I witnessed myself on Sanghelios.' The Arbiter supported Captain Sandman's decision that is slowly changing the face of this galaxy.

'Captain, since we'll be known to the public of these Citadel races then perhaps we might begin influencing their political and military matters so that they avoid our sectors of space and so that we might roam across the galaxy undisturbed?' Admiral Hood suggested an interesting possibility, but one that Captain Sandman could not accomplish.

'I'm sorry Admiral. I am an officer and a Spartan. I cannot negotiate or influence the politics of others.' John replied while trying to scratch the blood stain off from his chest piece.

'Alright. I'll see about strengthening your military hold and giving you access to raw materials instead then. I expect monthly reports from you about progress in that universe. Weekly reports are accepted as well, but monthly should be enough.'

'Yes, Sir!' Captain Sandman saluted to the Admiral. The Arbiter then spoke again.

'I'll try to gather support for signing an official alliance treaty with the Humans so that we may begin sending our support your way. The Sangheili Council is taking interest in that universe as well, but we need public support for any action currently.'

'I understand, Arbiter. Thank you, Sirs.' Captain Sandman's discussion with his superiors and his second-in-command was rudely interrupted when an Ensign came into his room with a datapad containing official entries into this 'Galactic Codex' that the Citadel races kept.

There were the newest additions open to articles about the UNSC, Battlegroup Foxtrot, the Sangheili and John himself.

'Also, Sir, a quarian by the name of Daro'Xen is applying to join our ship's scientific staff. Should we let her join us?'

'Sign her up for now. I'll evaluate her later.' Captain John took the datapad and began reading the Codex entries that were released to

the public already. ''I sure hope that this galactic community doesn't blame us for its problems all of a sudden and doesn't attempt to start a smear campaign against us.''

**\*\*UNSC:\*\***

>The United Nations Space Command, commonly referred to as the UNSC, is the military, exploratory and scientific branch of the Unified Earth Government. The UNSC appeared recently in this Galaxy through means of ''interdimensional slipspace travel''.<p>

The UNSC's primary function is the defense of Earth and her colonies as well as the representation of Humanity on a Galactic scale. What limited information is available implies that the UNSC is roughly four hundred years old and has formed from the bloody wars of the Sol system in the 22nd Century when remnants of old ideologies clashed for supremacy. The UNSC is the counterpart to the Systems Alliance of this universe, but a vastly more powerful counterpart. After the events on and around Earth in February 6th, 2185, the UNSC was officially listed as a pending member of the Citadel species. The UNSC can be found and contacted at the planet they called ''Caprica'' at the border of the Local Cluster.

**\*\*Sangheili:\*\***

>The Sangheili are a race of warriors who value honor and teamwork above all else and are comparable to warriors found in Earth's history like the Samurai of Japan or the Spartans of Ancient Greece. The Sangheili are a reptile-like race who originate from a triple star system and come from a slightly arid world known as ''Sanghelios''. The most prominent features of every Sangheili is the lack of a chin, their four mandibles, their great strength and high intelligence level. Their government is composed of a High Council that is elected by the people and rules for at least ten years. The High Council's leader â€" an Arbiter â€" oversees their work and takes part in vital political, economic and military questions. Currently they can be found on the UNSC outpost world Caprica at the border of the Local Cluster.<p>

**\*\*Battlegroup Foxtrot:**

><strong>The Sangheili and UNSC's primary military and exploratory force in this universe, consisting of more than sixty heavily armed and armored warships, Battlegroup Foxtrot's missions involve military action and exploration of our Galaxy. It is currently led by Captain John Sandman, a war hero of the UNSC and is headquartered at the outpost world Caprica. Battlegroup Foxtrot is forming tight relations with the Systems Alliance Navy to ensure better protection for both sides in case of an invasion from an unknown force or in any other unpredicted event. The flagship of Battlegroup Foxtrot is an Infinity-class Heavy Warship known as the UNSC Infinite Dawn â€" one of the three most powerful vessels in UNSC Navy's arsenal.

**\*\*Captain John Sandman:**

><strong>Captain John Sandman is a decorated UNSC war hero and an augmented super-soldier known as a ''SPARTAN-IV''. He is the commander of Battlegroup Foxtrot and is in charge of all UNSC's activities within our Galaxy. His personal file contains a lot of black ink, but he is known to be a military genius, often relying on superior tactics to win a fight instead of brutal force, but when all else fails then he is known for utilizing the vast arsenal of high-yield weaponry that his ships wield. Known to have a Sangheili female friend accompany him by his side almost at all times, he is an

officer loyal to his government and his subordinates, always hearing out suggestions from those around him before making his own decision.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Sorry if there are ANY inaccuracies about the Alarei part. Haven't played Mass Effect 2 in a while.<br>Anyways, I hope you enjoyed this chapter and I'd really appreciate if you all would check out a forum I made a while back called ''Fans of Halo and Mass Effect''\*\*. \*\*All of you may feel free to join it. I could use the community. :P\*\*

#### 14. The Council and the Mercenary

\*\*Heya guys and girls. Bringing you a fresh chapter to all of you who were patiently waiting for an update. I'm really sorry I had gone silent... Naval College is really tiring and I just needed a lot of time to myself to rest and do other things like study... but hey, I will never quit without informing you, readers. So, enjoy the chapter.

><strong>

\* \* \*

><p><strong>February 21st, 2185 Local Calendar, Local Universe's Earth, 1534 hours by UTC.<br>\*\*Battlegroup Foxtrot's 1st Attack Flotilla, consisting of the UNSC Infinite Dawn, one Autumn-class Heavy Cruiser, two Marathon-class Heavy Cruisers, one CCS-class Battlecruiser and four UNSC Destroyers, was hovering over Earth, merged with Earth's First and Fifth Fleets. The ships were merged because of a planned travel towards the Citadel to officially recognize the UNSC and Sangheili as allies of the Citadel species.

''Captain, our plan is to escort your flotilla to the Charon relay where the First Fleet will break off and return to Earth. From the Charon relay elements of the Fifth Fleet will escort you to the Citadel. From there on, your flagship will have to dock with the Citadel and let the diplomats get onboard the Citadel.''

''Acknowledged, Admiral. We're calculating trajectory right now. Lead on when ready.''

Captain Sandman, acknowledging Admiral Hackett's plan, ended the communications and sat down on his chair while dressed in his officer's uniform.

The UNSC Flotilla, along with the Systems Alliance, set course for the Charon relay and began their short trip to the Citadel.

''I really am not looking forward to meeting this Council. What if they label us enemies just because our ships are bigger and carrying heavier armament than theirs?'' Jessica expressed her skepticism of establishing contact while John dismissed her fears as unbiased.

''Relax. They won't be able to harm us if we nuke their entire capital just to be safe. Hehe.''

John seemed to always have a backup plan in case things go south and Jessica's hologram crossed her arms

over her chest, questioning John's idea.

'Really? Nuking the entire place just to prevent them from fighting with us? Perhaps diplomacy is a better idea after allâ€|'

'See? Everything will work out perfectly.' John smirked, looking at Jessica and then quickly turned back to view the front to see the mass relay that the group was flying to.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Mnemosyne, Unknown System, February 21<strong>\*\*\*st\*\*\*\*, 1601 hours by UTC.

><strong>The orbit of the brown dwarf Mnemosyne was unusually stormy as a massive planetary storm was raging across it. The Normandy SR-2 had dropped out of FTL above the orbit, searching for a dead Reaper floating in orbit thanks to a tip from Cerberus' leader â€" the Illusive Man.

Almost immediately after dropping out of FTL, the Normandy found its target and began its descent into the unstable brown dwarf, nearing the derelict Reaper which had a Cerberus base inside of it, providing a perfect area for docking.

As the Normandy approached the Reaper, it approached an extended docking port, connecting it with its airlock and letting Commander Shepard and his three man team to board the vessel that is presumed to be 'dead'. Upon entering the research area, the team found that it was empty and immediately began reviewing records. They found out that the research team was getting indoctrinated and the team continued moving into the ship where they encountered husks.

'Shepard, remind me, what's our mission inside a Reaperâ€|?' Garrus Vakarian, one of Shepard's two team members, asked while shooting down a husk.

'We need to get a Reaper IFF so that we can pass through the Omega-4 relay. At least, that's what the Illusive Man claimed.'

'Rightâ€| Remind me never to go inside a Reaper.'

\* \* \*

><p><strong>One hour later, Citadel, Presidium Area, 2185, 1711 hours by UTC.<br>\*\*\*After two hours of superluminal travel towards the Citadel, John and his Sangheili representative arrived in the Human Embassy on the Citadel Presidium where they were awaiting the chance to speak with the Citadel Council. Before they had arrived to the Embassy, John and Rala had taken a few detours to look at the magnificent architecture of the Citadel. John immediately remembered his childhood history lessons where his teacher said something about space stations shaped similarly to the Citadel. Those stations were meant to spin to create artificial gravity and similar ones existed in the late twenty first and twenty second centuries when artificial gravity was extremely expensive. Soon after the detours, John and Rala arrived at the Embassy and began waiting for a long while.

'This is boring. Waiting for the Council to ready itself for

receiving an audience with a new governmentâ€|'' Captain Sandman complained about the intolerable waiting period.

'Be patient, Captain. They have many questions to discuss among themselves andâ€|'' Admiral Anderson, the man who was chosen to be Humanity's representative by Commander Shepard, tried to convince the Captain of the Council's important work when the Council called the Human embassy through holographic communications. 'â€|And there they are. You and your alien friend can talk with them now.'

'You must be the Captainâ€| Sandman.' The turian ambassador, Quentius, spoke, addressing Captain Sandman and then looked towards his alien friend. 'And youâ€| if this data is right, you must be Rala 'Thenam. A representative of the Sangheili race.' Quentius raised his datapad, reading information from it.

'Our reputation precedes us. My name is John Sandman, Captain of the UNSC Navy, commanding officer of the UNSC warship \_Infinite Dawn \_and commander of Battlegroup Foxtrot. This is Spec Ops Officer Rala 'Thenam. She's a close friend to me.'

'Honored to meet you, but let's cut this short. My name is Quentius. I am the Councilor representing the Turian Hierarchy, the mightiest military force in the Galaxy. The Asari Councilor to my right is Irissa and she represents the Asari Republics. The Salarian Councilor is Esheel and she represents the Salarian Union. Together with Admiral David Anderson, we form the Citadel Council and now we must discuss your relations with us. Will you be an ally or an enemy?' Quentius was doing all the speaking while the other Councilors were simply watching.

'Well, I think the answer's kind of obvious. I am here as a friend.' John answered, looking carefully at each of the councilors except Anderson.

'Well, I guess that we will need a permanent ambassador from both of your governments to reside on the Citadel, but firstâ€| a question. I've read reports about you saying that you have gathered knowledge on the Reapers. Tell me, do you believe them?' The asari councilor, Irissa, was reading her datapad when she gave her question to the Captain.

'With an all-too-recent war for Human survival behind the backs of the UNSC, I would never dare to dismiss the Reapers as a preposterous rumor.'

'Hmph.' The asari councilor turned her head away from facing the Captain to looking at the Salarian councilor.

'I can't say I can openly deny them. My predecessor made that mistake and now he's dead.' Quentius couldn't refuse to see the threat.

'Look, Councilors, as much as I'd love to chat about politics, I really am a Naval officer and I must hurry back to my fleet. There are many things that are in need of me and I just can't leave them to my second-in-command. He has a way of wandering off, searching for trouble.'

'Very wellâ€| we will postpone this meeting until an official



representative of the UNSC and the Sangheili can arrive.'' The Salarian councilor disconnected from the comms. The Asari councilor quickly followed, but the Turian councilor had something to talk about.

''Captain, I've received an inquiry coming from a planet 100 light-years off of the Sol System from a Turian being held captive. Is this true?''

''Yes, there was a spy tracing us all the way from Omega to Caprica. One of my ships scratched it off with point-defense fire, capturing the Turian later on. We're keeping her onboard the Infinite Dawn's brig.''

''From Omega? Huhâ€¦ I planned to force you to release her but once you mention the name Omega then everything changes. Maybe you'll hand her over to us?'' The Turian councilor wanted to use the change to interrogate a criminal from Omega, but Captain Sandman did not agree as it was an internal UNSC matter.

''I'm sorry councilor, but this is an internal UNSC matter.''

Quentius, realized that if he was to attempt to use force to get results then, in the end, he would get nothing at all. Quentius wasn't like his predecessor at all and he retained the more diplomatic approach.

''Please, be gentle with a member of our race.''' Quentius left the conversation, completely ending the meeting with the Council until politicians arrive to represent the UNSC and the Sangheili. John immediately contacted Jessica who was left on the Infinite Dawn for security reasons. John wanted to inform the UEG's President â€œ Doctor Charet â€œ of the diplomatic progress.

''Jessica, get me a direct line to President Ruth Charet, please.''

''Will do. Please hold on.''

''Captain John Sandman of the Infinite Dawn, I presume?'' The female president of the United Earth Government tried to identify the one she was connected with in a slipspace communications signal.

''Yes, ma'am. I'm reporting you about progress in the Citadel Council that I am sure you're aware of.''

''The High Command would never dare to keep the president in the shadow.''

''Good. We're going to need one political representative for the UEG and one for the Sangheili. At least for the time we're spending in this universe.''

''Very well. I know just who I'll send to represent us there. Any other things that you'd like to inform me about, Captain?''

''No, ma'am. If Admiral Hood is giving you copies of my reports then you will see everything we've done here.''

'Very well, Captain. Good luck.' President Charet left the conversation.

'Back to Caprica, then. It was good to meet you, Councilor Anderson. Our representatives will arrive here soon so please do them a favor and tell the Citadel Defense Force to ignore the threats of ships jumping out of bluish portals.' The Captain turned around from facing Anderson to facing the door and proceeded to leave the embassy along with Rala.

John and Rala were returning to the Infinite Dawn to make the slip back to Caprica and interrogate the Turian captive.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>UNSC Cataclysm, High orbit around Mnemosyne, Unknown System, 1856 hours by UTC.<br>\*>The UNSC Cataclysm had been hovering in orbit for over an hour already, waiting for a signal from the Normandy and Shepard. Shepard had been exploring a Derelict Reaper without Chris' knowing and so the Headhunter Commander thought that Shepard was betraying him, until his ship had scanned the Normandy.

'Chrisâ€| perhaps we should get down closer to them?' Tanya suggested a possibility to Chris meant to rescue the Normandy.

'No. If the Normandy has beenâ€| I don't knowâ€| zombified, then it could happen to us as well and the only ship that could take us down would be John's Infinite Dawn. I don't want to risk that.' Chris was working out the worst case scenario in his head, but then Tanya chimed in, disturbing him.

'Chris, the Normandy has just entered high orbit and are proceeding to land in our hangar deck. Shepard's on his way.' Tanya had turned her back towards Chris for a second while telling him about the return of the Normandy. When she turned back around, she noticed that Chris had disappeared already. 'You're fast but I'm still faster, Chris.' Tanya's hologram immediately disappeared and she appeared in the main hangar bay in which the Normandy had landed. She was observing Shepard and Chris already discussing about what the crew of the Normandy found on the Derelict Reaper.

'Look at this, Chris. We found it extracted by a Cerberus research team aboard the Derelict Reaper.' Shepard showed Chris a mysterious device that Chris knew nothing about.

'What is it?' Chris asked, confusingly.

'It's a Reaper IFF.' Shepard responded.

'Isn't it contagious?' Tanya joined in the conversation and began analyzing the small device that Shepard held in his hand.

'No. EDI already analyzed it and the IFF is ready to be installed into the Normandy's systems.' Shepard explained, calming Tanya.

'Rightâ€| if you're planning on integrating it with your ship's systems then the Cataclysm will have to stay with you at all times. It might call upon the entire Reaper Fleet and you could use our

thermonuclear arsenal if it truly is a trap.' Chris explained why keeping the Cataclysm close to the Normandy is the perfect choice. 'Our arsenal cannot be compared to the Infinite Dawn'sâ€ they have more thermonuclear warheads with fifty and sixty megaton yields, but we can refill our arsenal using our Forerunner resupply systems aboard our ship.'

'You've had me the moment you mentioned your nuclear arsenal. Right, stick along with us, but how are you going to hide yourselves? We can't raise suspicion if anyone's going to target the Normandy.' Shepard wasn't really convinced of the Cataclysm's stealth capabilities. He believed that a ship that size didn't even have any sort of stealth abilities.

'We'll remain in slipspace. You just need to install this little device aboard your ship.' Tanya turned around and looked as two UNSC Marines were marching up to the Normandy, one of them carrying a slipspace COM device. It was a small, light grey device with a holographic display that can be activated with the press of the device's only button.

As soon as the Marines arrived close to Shepard, the latter took the device and observed it, carefully learning all he should know about it.

'I'm pretty sure you'll know how to activate it. Our slipspace emergency channel is One One Zero Nine Dash Echo. Try not to break it though, it was very expensive and designed only two weeks ago.' Chris gave a friendly warning to Shepard, who immediately took the COM device with him and went back inside the Normandy.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Infinite Dawn, Caprica's troposphere, 0112 hours by UTC. Brig.<br>\*\*\*The Infinite Dawn had made a slipspace jump from the Citadel directly to Caprica, leaving only the slipspace wake behind, that no one knows how to utilize. Upon arriving in Caprica, the ship took position five kilometers above the ground, in the planet's troposphere, right next to its capital city which is a massive mega metropolis taking up an island the size of the United Kingdom and having a total population of one billion. It seemed like the UNSC was planning on staying in the universe for a long time.

'Captain. Here's the prisoner.' One of the Brig's guards, a Marine Gunnery Sergeant, led Captain John Sandman to the Turian prisoner that was being kept aboard the UNSC Infinite Dawn for some time already. The Captain approached the Turian's cell. The only thing separating the Turian and the SPARTAN was a thin but solid, orange colored energy field.

'Leave us, Marine.' The Captain ordered while looking at an alien he's never seen before.

'Sir!' The Marine left the brig, returning to his post near the entrance.

'What's your nameâ€ Turian?' The Captain began asking questions to the Turian female.

'Nyreen. Nyreen Kandros.' The Turian reluctantly answered, trying

to look away from the tall Human, clad in black, bulky armor. ''What is yours?''

''John Sandman. I'm the Captain of this warship. What led you to do such a move? What caused you to attach your ship to the hull of the Shield of Sparta and send that massive amount of intel about us? How did you manage to slice past the Sparta's cyberwarfare defense network?'' John was trying to hide the fact that all UNSC ships have artificial intelligences. He didn't want anyone getting nervous while aboard his ship as he has heard the rumors of AIs gone rampant in this universe.

''Don't play stupid. I know you people have AIsâ€¦ yours was just offline when I sliced into your network and copied a lot of your files.'' The sudden words from Nyreen's mouth made John contact his AI â€œ Jessica.

''Jessica, check the Shield of Sparta's maintenance logs from the twenty ninth of January to the thirty first. When did they disable their AI and why?''

''Captain, the Shield of Sparta's AI was disabled due to rampancy. It caused some instabilities in their life support systems so they initiated Article 55 of UNSC Regulation 12-145-72. Their AI was safely deactivated and sent back to Earth for further research into creating metastable AIs. A new one was installed and a sudden breach of security was detected, but they didn't consider reporting it or activating a backup AI.'' Jessica almost instantly had access to Shield of Sparta's maintenance logs.

''Right. Remind me to contact the Shield of Sparta's CO.'' John turned his attention back to the Turian prisoner â€œ Nyreen. ''Aria T'Loak. She sent you, didn't she?'' There was no answer from Nyreen. Her eyes widened from the surprise, but she remained silent, trying to hide the truth. ''I know Aria sent you and I know I'll send a sixty megaton thermonuclear device on Omegaâ€¦ ifâ€¦ you decide to cooperate. I think you are well aware of the resulting damage.'' Nyreen's eyes widened even more. She thought she was standing in front of a monster, but John didn't even know that there were innocent civilians on Omega.

''You monster! There are thousands of innocent civilians on Omega! I can't risk Aria's secrets, but I can't have the blood of thousands on my hands.'' Nyreen went back deeper into her cell to her bed. John looked away, realizing that he made an actual threat on the lives of innocent civilians. ''Look, I didn't know there were civilians on Omega. The official reports that I...'' John imitated a cough ''â€¦ acquired from the Citadel Defense Force said that Omega is packed with criminals.''

Nyreen got back up from her bed, approaching the energy field again. ''And do you believe the official reports? The Citadel labels everyone in the Terminus as pirates, slavers, raiders and so on. In reality, many in the Terminus systems are just escaping the political shitstorms of the Citadel.''

''Believe me, I've read dozens of official reports having billions of names written on them and all labeled as killed in action. There is a memorial to all twenty three billion dead Humans on deck three hundred.'' John remembered the Human-Covenant War, something Nyreen

didn't know.

'What are you talking about?'

'You don't know this, but we come from another universe. A different reality. There, Humanity was engulfed in a twenty seven year long conflict against an alien union known as the Covenant Empire. The war was bloody with hundreds of planets glassed, reduced to nothing more than ash. Billions of people dead. I could show you the reports and video recordings, but I don't think you will believe me either way.'

Nyreen seemed to begin glowing blue and she emitted a small blue orb from her hand that was shooting towards John before it disappeared once it touched the energy field.

'What?' John simply gazed at the attempt to possibly throw him back using a sort of telekinetic ability.

'I'm a biotic, but this fieldâ€¦ I can't breach itâ€¦' Nyreen brought her hand up to observe her own biotic power circulating around her. 'Turians rarely have bioticsâ€¦ Captain.'

'Look, I didn't mean to threaten the civilians aboard Omega, butâ€¦ do you want to get out of that confined space?' John wanted to free Nyreen and possibly recruit her as a crew member for the Infinite Dawn.

'I knowâ€¦' Nyreen sighed and made her biotic powers disappear. 'â€¦Yes, I want to get out. It's intolerable to be in this tiny roomâ€¦' John reached for a control panel with which he lowered the energy field and slowly stretched his hand out towards Nyreen.

'Then join me. Come under my command and give me your knowledge of Omega. I promise, we won't make any attack on Omega without your consent but your skillset would be useful for Battlegroup Foxtrot.' John offered Nyreen the chance to work in a better, more reliable job.

'And what will I be doing onboard your ship? I've no reason to join you.'

'Well, for starters, you could be leading a squad of Marineâ€¦' John was rudely interrupted by Nyreen who spoke up, declaring that she was the head of a mercenary group.

'I was the head of the Talons Mercenary group. Commanding a platoon would beâ€¦ respectable for me. My mercenaries had gone way out of control and I'd like to be in charge of trained soldiers, not Batarians that have a deep hatred for their fellow soldiers.' Nyreen accepted Captain Sandman's offer as a Platoon Leader and shook his hand.

'When do I begin?'

'You will begin today at eight thirty. Your platoon will be waiting at deck one hundred and forty in the training room. You'll find it if you can read English. There is also a room unoccupied on deck three hundred. It's yours if you want it.' John gave Nyreen a datapad with

the instructions on how to live aboard a UNSC vessel and how to access her personal quarters. John then began thinking to himself \_'I've definitely got to keep my eye on her. Just in case she decides to cause chaos aboard my ship, I'll have her very own team arrest her... but her skillset is very valuable, especially if the UNSC wants to improve its combat effectiveness.''\_

'Alrightâ€|'' Nyreen took the datapad and proceeded to leave the brig, but right at the exit she stopped, turning to face the Captain. 'â€| Captainâ€| I forgive you.''' Nyreen proceeded to leave the brig, heading for the nearest elevator and trying to avoid unwanted eye contact with the unknown aliens and the Humans aboard the ship while taking an occasional look out the windows to take a peek at the growing Human colony.

Captain Sandman was taking a trip across the ship while en-route back to his private cabin. He was taking a look at how things were going on at the deck he was on. The deck was not very crowded because most of the Marines and crewmembers were still asleep. John decided that it was a good idea to actually get some sleep as he was thinking of finding the Cataclysm and the Normandy, and help them defeat the Collectors that are still a threat to Humans beyond the border of Citadel space. While on his way to the Cabin, John had passed through the Spartan deck to remove his armor and what remained on him was his officer's uniform from the 2530s.

As soon as John arrived in his Cabin, Rala rushed to his side, hugging him hard.

'Uhâ€| what's this all about?'' John didn't really know why Rala was trying to squeeze him.

'I can't hug my favorite Human?'' Rala slowly let go of John who closed the doors behind him.

'Sure you can, butâ€| I'm just feeling a bit tired nowâ€|'' John slowly approached the bed with Rala hot on his trail.

'I was expecting that we'll have some time to ourselves today, Johnâ€|'' Rala hung her head down while looking at John who was still standing next to the bed.

'Hey, chin up.' John wrapped his hands around Rala's waist. 'I'm not THAT tired.' John's lips had slowly approached Rala's mandibles and he kissed her. She immediately kissed him back and the two fell into the bed, making love with each other, taking their minds off of their stressful job.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Well then... Nyreen Kandros. I guess many of you know her. The Turian female biotic from Omega DLC. I did NOT like the way BioWare treated their only Turian female biotic so I decided to involve her in my story instead of letting things go as BioWare made them go. I hope you all enjoyed this chapter, sorry if it's a bit too short, but as always... leave a review with your thoughts and suggestions and have a fun time.<strong>

**\*\*Hey readers... bringing you another chapter for Reclaimers. We're nearing the invasion on the Collector Base and so, we're getting very close to the Reaper Invasion of the Galaxy. Anyway, I shouldn't keep you from reading so... dive in.**

**><strong>**

**\* \* \***

**><p><strong>March 1st, 2554, Caprica, High Orbit, UNSC Cataclysm's bridge.<br>\*\*The UNSC Cataclysm was holding high orbit over the UNSC colony of Caprica in the other universe along with the rest of the Battlegroup. Aboard the ship, Commander Chris and Commander John, both clad in their MJOLNIR MARK X Forerunner upgraded armor, along with Tali, Krilus and Edward were trying to call the Infinite Dawn when they received an auto-replay message from the Dawn's bridge.**

**'You have reached the bridge of the United Nations Space Command heavy capital warship Infinite Dawn. Currently, the entire crew is on shore leave and if you wish to leave a message, please do so after the signal.'**

Chris immediately stopped the communications with the Infinite Dawn, realizing that he was left in charge of the entire Battlegroup. He understood that he had a lot of responsibilities for now, at least until Captain Sandman and his flagship returns.

**'Chris, one of the Captains of the Battlegroup is saying that you're in charge of the Battlegroup while Captain Sandman and his crew is in theirâ€| two month vacation.'** Tanya had chimed in, informing everyone on the bridge of the Cataclysm.

**'I know that, Tanya. Did John leave any specific instructions on what to do during his absence?'** Chris raised his head to look at Tanya while he was leaning on the holo-table.

**'Yes, in fact he did. He wants you to keep exploring the Galaxy and find out everything about the Reapers. Basically, assist Shepard in his mission against the Collectors.'**

Chris turned his head, looking at his team for a second and especially looking at Tali. He turned his head back to face Tanya and finally nodded.

**'Then let's get to work!'** Chris stood straight up, in all his Spartan glory, looking to the front of the bridge. **'Everyone, we are embarking on a crusade against the unknown who has ''collected'' Humans for years now. If they have collected the Humans of this universe, then they are an enemy of us, the UNSC. My team and Commander Shepard's crew has firsthand experience with them and I want to know if all of you are ready to take the fight to them?'**

The crew slowly stood up, leaving their work stations and looking towards their Commander. All of them stood up for a while until they saluted to their officer.

**'Sir, yes sir!'** Then Chris looked behind him, seeing his own team salutingâ€| and even Tali.

'Let's kick their asses as hard as we can, Chris.' John B-201 had literally shouted across the bridge while Chris let out a faint smile under his helmet. He turned his gaze back to Tanya while formulating a question.

'Where's Commander Shepard now?'

'Long range scans have pin-pointed the Normandy to be in the Styx Theta Cluster. I'm hacking into a comm buoy to access its systems and determine the Normandy's status.' Tanya took a moment to pause and then delivered the news to Chris. 'Commander, the Normandy is under attack by a Collector Cruiser. I suggest we head out immediately!'

'All hands, action stations! Tanya, spin up the FTL drive and get us to the Normandy's location!'

'Aye, Chris.' Tanya immediately began the process of spinning up the Cataclysm's FTL drive and calculated the jump coordinates for the ship to arrive precisely seven kilometers away from the Normandy.

Almost an instant later, the Cataclysm began its slipspace jump and entered the slipspace portal. Several minutes later, it left slipspace precisely at the coordinates that Tanya had calculated and the entire bridge crew could see a Cruiser-type vessel hovering right next to the Normandy, having several tubes attached.

'Power up missile tubes and prepare to fire on my command.' Chris sat down on his Captain's chair and moved with it next to the holo-table, analyzing the situation.

'Hold on, Chris. There's a signal coming from the Normandy.' Tanya was analyzing a signal being sent from the Normandy's engineering bay.

'The ship's AI is contacting me saying that we must shoot the tubes to prevent the Collectors from taking anyone aboard their ship.'

'Wait, wait, wait! they're abducting the Normandy's crew?' John B-201 joined the conversation with the rest of the team right behind him.

'It would appear so.' Tanya finished. Chris immediately ordered the ship's point-defense batteries to bombard the docking tubes. Tanya immediately executed the order, activating several frontal PD batteries and opened fire, annihilating every docking tube that was attached to the Normandy, but, suddenly, the Collector Cruiser began charging its weapons and raised its shields at the same time as moving away from the Normandy.

'Tanya, intercept and destroy that Cruiser, but send a platoon of Marines onboard the Normandy first!'

'Understood, Commander.' Tanya immediately began evasive maneuvers while inside one of the ship's starboard hangar bays two Pelicans were being prepped for take-off along with twenty Marines inside each.



The Cataclysm made a trick maneuver right next to the Normandy when it was located right next to the Cataclysm's starboard hangars. After that, two Pelicans departed the Cataclysm and managed to squeeze inside the Normandy's hangar bay that was opened. Inside, the Marines were met by the ship's pilot, Flight Lieutenant Jeff ''Joker'' Moreau. The helmsman told the Marines that the Collectors were spread across all floors and that the only way to safely maneuver was the emergency shafts spread across the Normandy. The heavy armor for the Marines was surely an obstacle, but they could still fit inside them as the Marines proceeded to spread across the upper decks in teams of ten per deck, armed with different weapons each. The Marines began to immediately clear out the decks of the Normandy from the Collectors that were stuck aboard it, while the pilots of the Pelicans remained near their dropships, discussing things with each other.

''Hey, Phil, I hear that the flagship of the Navy has got energy weapons installed on her. You knowâ€¦ those Covenant weapons that were used to glass our planets?'' One of the pilots said, while the other one was trying to think about something else.

''Hmâ€¦ Nah, I don't think so. The Navy doesn't think it has the necessary energy reactors to power MACs, point-defenses, missiles, nuclear silos, those broadside Onagers and every other system on a ship of that size let alone some damn energy weapons. Besides, didn't energy weapons eat away a lot of energy? More than deuterium reactors can provide?''

''Wellâ€¦ the Navy has its secrets, Philâ€¦'' While the two pilots were talking to each other, Joker was carefully listening into their conversation, but he was completely shocked when he saw something far behind them all. The Collector Cruiser was lining up for a shot against the Normandy!

''Uhhâ€¦ guysâ€¦ Look!'' Joker pointed at the Cruiser and the pilots immediately looked at what he was pointing at. They saw the Collector Cruiser charging up its beam weapons.

Meanwhile, the Cataclysm was located at least one thousand kilometers away from the Normandy and the Collector Cruiser.

''Tanya, how did they fool us?'' Chris demanded an answer, slamming on the holotable and slightly deforming it.

''Chris, we fell into a trap. They deployed some sort of beacon that our radars and LIDARS mistook for the shipâ€¦ we ended up following it.'' Tanya analyzed the LIDARS information and discovered that the Normandy was being attacked.

''Chris, the Normandy is under attack!''

Chris immediately turned around to look into a radar that was shown on a large monitor right behind him, mounted on the wall. ''Well, holy shitâ€¦ Tanya, immediately line up the MAC and fire everything into that Collector ship!''

Tanya, acknowledging the order, began coordinating an emergency situation MAC salvo â€" firing from all the MAC guns at once, followed up by five hundred missiles and supported by point-defense fire.

The ship lined up fairly quickly while the MACs were charging and, right when the ship had its front aligned with the Cruiser, its MACs were ready to unleash hell. Meanwhile, the missiles were already fired to compensate for their slow speed, and, while they flew 500 kilometers, the MACs were finally fired. Three orange-glowing slugs left the Cataclysm's MAC barrels immediately being followed up by point-defense shells. The MAC slugs quickly flew past the Archer missiles and rammed into the Collector Cruiser. The violent impact from the Cataclysm's MACs destabilized the entire Cruiser and it suffered extreme hull damage. The Cruiser then attempted to flee, however a thousand Archer missiles rained down on its hull, hitting as hard as they can, dealing even more hull damage. Eventually, the Collector Cruiser's hull finally succumbed to the damage and it exploded in a very violent explosion, causing the Normandy's kinetic barriers to drop.

'Wellâ€¦ that went well, didn't it?' Tanya commented, seeing the Collector Cruiser's parts flying off in separate directions.

'At least we know the Normandy's safe from the outside.' Chris shared his thoughts with a smile and then proceeded to contact the Marines onboard the Normandy. 'Lieutenant, how's the situation on the Normandy?'

'Captain, we've got it under control. There weren't many of those freaks, but we managed to take them all out. They took some of our guys out too, butâ€¦ nothing we couldn't handle, sir.' The platoon leader, a Marine Lieutenant, answered with pride that he and his men could finish their work.

'Good job. Get the wounded and get back aboard the Cataclysm. We have saved the Normandy from peril.' Chris congratulated the Marines and turned back towards his own team.

'Wellâ€¦ that's one victory for us.'

'Butâ€¦ Chrisâ€¦ we destroyed the Cruiser.' Tali spoke, condemning Chris' decision to destroy the Collector Cruiser. 'We could've gained valuable information if we had just destroyed their enginesâ€¦' Tali hung her head down in disappointment. She was a curious little creature, and the fact that she couldn't examine the Collectors really hit her curiosity. Hard.

Chris approached Tali and put his hand on her shoulder.

'Don't worry, Taliâ€¦ we can still jump right into the Galactic core and explore their little baseâ€¦ once the Normandy decides to go through, that is.' Chris tried to calm Tali down, and he succeeded. Tali understood that there are greater things to find out in the Galactic core.

'What's next, Commander?' Krilus, the Turian team member asked, looking like he was really anxious for the next adventure.

'No ideaâ€¦ let's just wait here for Shepard to return.'

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Caprica colony, High orbit, UNSC Shield of Sparta's

bridge, March 1<strong>\*\*st\*\*\*\*, 1756 hours by UTC.

><strong>The commanding officer of the UNSC Shield of Spartan, an Autumn-class heavy cruiser, Commander Philips, was intercepting a transmission of some sort, coming from an unidentified location within the star system. The Commander approached the holo-table in the middle of the bridge and asked his AI to play the intercepted transmission, and pinpoint the location of the signal. The transmission was playing and some words were unintelligible, as they surely sounded alien, but his AI used the ship's database on alien languages from this universe and found out that it was a language called 'Batarian'', from the species who have the same name as their language.

'What are they doing here? This database says that they're almost never seen outside of their home sector.' Commander Philips didn't understand what was going on. In his mind raced a thought that perhaps the Batarians were staging for a full-scale invasion against either the UNSC or the Systems Alliance's capital "Earth. However, the translation confirmed that the Batarians weren't planning to attack on Caprica, but instead, make several raids on the Sol System and implicate the UNSC as the wrong-doers.

The Batarians did have a deep hatred for Humanity and even universes wouldn't change that.

'Commander" what should we do?' The Shield of Sparta's AI asked, wishing to know what is the Commander's next order.

'Rally the Fifth Flotilla around the Sparta and contact this" Admiral Hackett. Invite Commander Chris and Captain Sandman into the call.' Commander Philips was really looking for guidance and so he thought that the others would help him.

'Commander, Captain Sandman is not responding to his calls, but we did manage to contact Commander Chris and Admiral Hackett. I'm patching them through now.'

Slowly, multiple holographic figures popped up over the holo-table. One was a figure of an elderly man walking in his Navy's uniform, the other was a SPARTAN-III, clad in his heavy powered assault armor.

'Admiral.' The Commander saluted and then looked to the Commander. 'Commander.'

'At ease, Commander.' Chris managed to say that before Admiral Hackett could, and for a brief moment they looked at each other.

'Why are you calling us? I had to leave the meeting of the Admirals just to hear this out.' Admiral Hackett complained about leaving an important event.

'Sir, our ship's sensors have picked up Batarians inside our system. LIDARS say they're on the very edge of the system and we intercepted their voice transmissions. They're saying that they want to attack the Solar system and implicate the UNSC as the criminals" and" I was hoping you could help me take the right decision on what to do.'

'The only logical thing to do is, Commander, to wipe them all out or force them to retreat.' Commander Chris curled up a fist and raised it up to his chest, holding it in front of him.

'Hold on, Commanderâ€¦ Did you try and contact them? I don't think that excessive violence should be applied unless absolutely necessary.' Admiral Hackett wanted to try the more diplomatic approach, however Commander Philips' answer didn't make him feel any easier.

'No, Admiral, we didn't. The databanks that you have say that they never respond to any diplomacy.' Admiral Hackett knew this was true, but he still didn't want to apply excessive violence upon Batarians. They are members of the Galactic community after all.

'Commander, gather your ships and head in closer to them. Try to force them out of your system.'

'Yes, Admiralâ€¦' Philips turned slightly to the right and looked in his AI's eyes.

'Get our ships on the move. Intercept that Batarian unit.' When Philips' order was executed, the Shield of Sparta along with two Midlothian-class Destroyers and five Paris-class Heavy Frigates began moving towards the Batarian flotilla on the outskirts of the system. They were also supported by one CCS-class Battlecruiser that was provided by the Sangheili Council when Captain Sandman and the Infinite Dawn returned from their mission to Sanghelios.

The ships flew for about thirty minutes until they had approached the Batarian group as close as one thousand kilometers. The flotilla took cover behind a massive asteroid to hide their presence.

'Alright. I'm sending a single remote-controlled Longsword to investigate.' The Commander reported his steps to the Admiral.

'A whatâ€¦?' The Admiral didn't understand what was this Longsword that Commander Philips spoke of.

'It's a space superiority fighter. It's big.'

Commander Philips was personally controlling the fighter. The Longsword had approached very close to the Batarian group and was hiding most of its hull behind an asteroid with only its nose peeking out. The nose had multiple cameras planted on it.

'Wellâ€¦ there's our group. It looks like it consists of tiny warships.' Philips reported what he saw while the video feed was being shared to the Admiral of the Alliance Navy.

'This does look like a raiding party. Those are Batarian light warships and there's aâ€¦ oh myâ€¦ a super-heavy cruiserâ€¦' Hackett had recognized each of the warships and they reminded him of all those raider ships from the past encounters.

'Uhâ€¦ soâ€¦ what should we do?' Commander Philips kept the Longsword in position, but suddenly it was attacked. The Batarian ships had lined up their GARDIAN turrets and fired a rain of infrared bolts at the Longsword. The fighter was destroyed entirely.

'Please, Commander, wipe them all out but try to keep at least one ship alive.' Hackett issued the order and Philips acknowledged it. He ordered his ships to move out of cover as they began to line up their Magnetic Accelerator Cannons while the CCS-class Battlecruiser was moving through the asteroid field, flanking the Batarian group. There were about twelve light warships of which one was a super-heavy cruiser neither of those ships was larger than seven hundred meters but, technically, they outnumbered the UNSC flotilla.

'Commander, cannons lined up.' The AI informed the Captain as soon as the entire flotilla's weaponry was lined up.

'Standard salvo, but keep that super-heavy alive!' The Commander issued a firing order and the 50mm point-defense guns on the Shield of Sparta activated, rotating around and preparing to fend off any incoming missiles. The missile salvos opened up, releasing steam as the missiles were being prepared to fire and the MAC was already gathering a full charge to unleash a massive burst of three MAC shells.

'Fire!'

The ship's lights flickered for the slightest of moments as three brightly orange colored tungsten slugs left the Sparta's MAC barrel. All three shells rammed right into the nearest warship. The first shell drilled right through the ship's kinetic barriers and rammed deep into the hull. The second one rammed right through the hull while the third one missed, drilling into another ship right behind it. Both ships were crippled, however, their punishment was not yet at an end. A hundred missiles were flying straight at them, with GARDIAN defenses picking many off. However, those defenses soon were forced to vent their heat and ten out of a hundred missiles rammed right into the first of the incapacitated warships, destroying its already weakened hull.

After the Shield of Sparta fired its first salvo, the destroyers and frigates fired off theirs with point-defense fire and missile salvos firing one after another, surrounding the entire Batarian group in lead and explosives. The Batarians did not sit by idly, however. They fired off their salvos of their own kinetic weapons, concentrating on the largest of the UNSC cruisers.

The Shield of Sparta took seven direct hits to her front, but her thick Titanium-A3 armor plating was holding steady.

'Report!' The Commander recovered from the shaking of the ship as one of the ships had hit very close to the bridge.

'Commander, minor hull damage and fires on the deck below us, but damage control teams are already working to put them out. Nothing has harmed us.' The AI responded in a voice that was free of emotion.

'I really think we should complain to HIGHCOM that ships of our class need shields too.' The Commander complained about the Autumn-class vessels being poorly equipped for defense as they needed shields just like the Strident-class frigates or the Infinity-class heavy warships.

Meanwhile, the Batarian group was slowly being decimated by the surprise attack of the UNSC, but while the Batarians were occupied with the Fifth Flotilla, the CCS-class Battlecruiser had lined up a perfect broadside salvo from behind. It unleashed six plasma torpedoes upon six of the ships and they noticed that their shields didn't even react.

'Shipmaster, our torpedoes passed right past their shields without even triggering them.' One of the Sangheili bridge crew members reported of their success. The Sangheili Shipmaster, however, stood up in all his glory. He was wearing a golden Sangheili combat harness and had a scar running down from his left eye, possibly a reminder of the war against Humanity. This Shipmaster didn't believe in an easy victory.

'What? You mean, they don't have shields?' The Shipmaster tried to confirm what the crew member just said.

'They have. Look at the Human ships firing. They're triggering a blue field.' The Sangheili crew member pointed on the hologram where the Human 50mm projectiles and missiles were hitting the shields of the Batarian ships.

'Kinetic shieldingâ€¦ too easy. Fire them all down, but avoid firing on the flagship.'

The CCS-class Battlecruiser unleashed yet another salvo of plasma torpedoes that hit their intended targets right after. This was the fatal salvo that annihilated all resistance from the Batarians while their flagship tried to flee. It was charging up its FTL drive, however, the Shield of Sparta made a dangerous move. It rammed right into the flagship's engines, causing them to explode, scratching the Sparta's armor and causing the paint to scratch off, but the flagship was stuck adrift in space now.

'Admiral Hackett. Commander Philips here. We did it. The Batarian raiding party is all yours.' Admiral Hackett corrected his cap and shortly replied.

'I've already sent an Alliance Flotilla to capture that super-heavy. We'll take it from there, Commander. You may returnâ€¦ I'll be sure to notify your Captain of your actions when he returns.' Admiral Hackett smiled and ended the call. Meanwhile, the Commander turned to the front of the bridge, looking at one of the officers holding a datapad.

'Lieutenant, how many ships did we lose?'

'One frigate was heavily damaged and three other ships received minor damage. Our ship protected the rest of the flotilla from heavy salvos.'

'Goodâ€¦ time to head back to Caprica.'

\* \* \*

><p><strong>UNSC Cataclysm, Deep Space, Styx Theta Cluster, 1901 hours by UTC.<br>Chris was pacing around the bridge, walking in circles around the holotable. He was expecting a report from Shepard who had arrived just five minutes ago on a shuttle with his entire

team. It took two more minutes of pacing to receive a call from Shepard.

'Chrisâ€¦ we're back on the Normandy and everyone's in their places. Joker told us about what your ship did to theirs and I am very impressed. Destabilizing the ship while it's at full strength is impossible with the technology we have.' Shepard sounded amazed, at least from Joker's story.

'To mildly put it, this was how our daily adventures went down during the Human-Covenant War. Megaton yield explosions, extremely hard hits, insane combat maneuversâ€¦ all part of our job.' Chris drew a smile on his face, remembering the good old days when he and John B-201 could rip the skulls off of Covenant footsoldiers.

'Yeahâ€¦ wellâ€¦ I've decided on taking a trip to the Core. It's about time we got all the civilians back from that place. We'll make the trip in one week, because we need to take a rest first.'

Chris turned around, looking at a picture of Illium that just happened to be on one of the monitors. Apparently, Tanya had put it there because Illium was one large planet filled with all sorts of luxuries and massive skyscrapers.

'Wellâ€¦ how about a trip to Illium?' Chris said, thinking about what he could find on that planet.

'Sounds good. I've been there before and it's quite a great place to be in.'

'Then off we go.' Chris ended the call and looked towards Tanya. He didn't even need to speak as Tanya had already begun spinning up the Translight drive. The Normandy had parked inside one of the larger hangars just before the Cataclysm opened a slipspace wormhole and went straight through it, thus guaranteeing it a safe and relatively fast trip to Illium.

While the Cataclysm was traveling to Illium, Tanya had cracked open a secret weapon aboard it. It was a weapon of never before seen power that only the Forerunners could build and, apparently all those years ago, the Monitor of the Forerunner world on which the Cataclysm was assembled had secretly installed a Forerunner energy weapon similar to the Covenant energy projector.

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><p><strong>Another story is forming. The mysterious invasions of the Batarians in Alliance Space. I have wanted to have someone pull some strings to attempt to paint the UNSC in a bad reputation so that the Galaxy would try and hold it by its throat, so a story arc within a story begins. Anyway, I hope you liked this chapter and as always, don't be afraid to leave a review. Have a good day.<strong>

## 16. Suicide Mission

\*\*Hey everyone? How are you doing? I hope you're well and good, so I brought you all a new chapter! Have a good time reading the drama and stuff.

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\* \* \*

><p><strong>March 9th, 2554 (Military Calendar), 2185 (Local Universe Calendar), 0856 hours by UTC.<br>\*\*The UNSC Cataclysm and the Normandy SR-2 were flying next to a mass relay that would take them to the Omega Cluster. The two ships were preparing for what Shepard called 'The Suicide Mission' against the Collectors.

'Shepard, so, you guys jump in first and drop a beacon so that we may jump in there as well?' Commander Chris of the Cataclysm was making sure that he understood the plan.

'Yes, Chris. Just wait for our signal!' Shepard informed Chris as the Normandy approached the mass relay and was catapulted over to the Omega Cluster. The Cataclysm warmed up its slipspace drive to get ready for an immediate jump once the Normandy was ready to drop the beacon.

The Normandy arrived at the Omega-4 Relay and Shepard ordered EDI to activate the Reaper Identify Friend/Foe system. As the Normandy approached the relay, its energy began to fluctuate, but nevertheless, it managed to approach the relay and get catapulted over to the other side. The travel took longer than expected, but the Normandy arrived on the other side only to see a horrible sight â€" tens of thousands of pieces of debris were floating all around the galactic core and some of them were directly in the way of the Normandy. The Normandy's helmsman â€" Jeff 'Joker' Moreau â€" was trying to maneuver the ship out of the debris, but it was hard even for someone with such skill as him. He managed to scratch the ship a few times and lower its kinetic barriers down a bit, but nothing that would cause irreparable damage.

The Normandy managed to get out of the first wave of the debris and was in the clear. All that remained was tiny debris and that was the only thing between the Normandy and the Collector base, but another problem had emerged â€" Collector defense drones, Oculi.

Shepard immediately assembled a team and attended to the problem in the Normandy's cargo bay. Shortly after, he was contacted by Commander Chris of the Cataclysm.

'Shepard, what's taking you so long?' Chris asked, sounding very impatient.

'We have a problem. They're trying to board us in the cargo bay so this might take some time!' Shepard answered, trying to destroy an Oculi by aiming his M-100 Grenade Launcher at the Oculus. Shepard made a few well-placed shots at the Oculus, forcing it to retreat and buying himself enough time to dump the beacon that was stored aboard. The Normandy's cargo bay door opened and Shepard gave the beacon a slight push when the mass effect fields in the cargo bay were disabled and let way to the gravity that the supermassive black hole emitted. The beacon was sucked into the supermassive black hole's gravity and flew towards it while generating a signal for the UNSC Cataclysm to jump to.

'We have the coordinates. They're a few thousand kilometers away from the event horizon, but we can jump there.' Tanya informed the



bridge crew. ''Prolonged stay near the supermassive black hole may result in us getting caught in its gravitational fields.'' With that, Tanya precisely calculated the jump and opened the slipspace portal that transported the Cataclysm over to the galactic core. The Cataclysm emerged right next to the Normandy and began firing waves upon waves of 50mm point-defense shells and Archer missiles at the incoming Oculi drones that were awakened at the moment their radars detected the massive Supercarrier.

''Shepard, we've got you covered and we won't be coming any closer to the base. Go! Do whatever you had to do!'' Chris assured Shepard that he and his ship had everything under control and so Shepard and the Normandy approached the Collector Base, but when the Normandy came just within fifty kilometers of the base, a massive ship emerged from it â€” a second Collector Cruiser.

''It's as if one wasn't enough and now there's two!'' Joker tried commenting while piloting and closing the distance between the Normandy and the second Cruiser. Joker revealed the Normandy's secret weapon â€” a reverse-engineered molten metal beam weapon called the Thanix cannon. The Normandy charged up its secret weapon and fired immediately at the Collector Cruiser. The beam flew for several seconds until it rammed right into the Collector Cruiser and took down its kinetic barrier, but the Cruiser retaliated and fired back its beam weapon, severely damaging the Normandy's kinetic barriers and mass effect field, but the stealth frigate still remained fully operational. It tried lining up for another shot from the Thanix, but the Collector Cruiser wasn't letting it by firing its beams over and over again.

''We can't line up a shot! Chris, assist us!'' Joker requested for assistance and looked at a monitor, seeing the Cataclysm suddenly rotate by ninety degrees and line up its main guns towards the Collector Cruiser. One of the guns began charging up and two seconds after fired a massive shell that raced across the space between the Cataclysm and the Cruiser. The shell rammed into the Collector Cruiser with such force that the ship violently exploded from within, where its core was severely damaged. The explosion destroyed the Normandy's mass effect field while the Normandy was located inside the Collector Base's field. This destabilization caused the Normandy to crash on the Collector Base's walls, but even when landing on the walls of the base of the enemy, Shepard always had a plan. He split his team up and went onwards to his goal â€” destroy the base and save the colonists in the process.

Meanwhile, aboard the Cataclysm, Tanya had calculated a massive problem.

''Chris, I have miscalculated the gravitational pull of the supermassive black hole.'' Tanya confessed, with her hologram popping up over a holotank and her head being tilted down to the ground in shame. ''Due to my inexperience with black holes, I expected this one to beâ€¦ less powerful. I was mistaken. Its gravitational fields expand two times further than the outermost debris ring here and thus we're closer to the event horizon than I previously thought.''

Tali approached Tanya with a question.

''Butâ€¦ if we're close to this event horizon, doesn't that mean that we're getting sucked \_into \_the black hole?'' Tali nervously asked.

If there was something more than the geth she feared then it's getting torn apart by gravity.

'Yes. According to my analysis, we're slowly accelerating into the black hole itself. At this rate we'll reach the event horizon in thirty minutes and we won't be able to leave the gravitational pull.' Tanya looked shocked all of a sudden. 'Our escape velocity currently is ten thousand kilometers per hour and it is rapidly increased. In thirty minutes it will be precisely at two hundred ninety nine thousand and seven hundred ninety two kilometers per second.'

The entire bridge crew looked in awe, wishing to leave as fast as possible, but they knew they had a duty. They had to keep the Oculi away from the Collector Base so that the Normandy doesn't get damaged and so that Shepard manages to do his job.

'Shepard! This is Chris!' Chris tried to contact Shepard and inform him of the situation.

'This is Shepard. Go ahead, Cataclysm.' Shepard responded while in the middle of a massive firefight against Collector security forces.

'Shepard, we've got a major problem on our hands. The Cataclysm is caught in the black hole's gravitational field. You have twenty five minutes to finish your job or we won't be able to protect you! The black hole is sucking us inside!' Chris gave Shepard a time limit to his mission and cut the comms line.

'You do realize that after twenty five minutes our sub-light thrusters will not be able to generate a thrust equal to ninety percent of light speed to allow us to escape, don't you?'

'I do. Start the countdown, Tanya.' Chris began thinking of a plan how to escape the supermassive black hole when he heard a sudden crack. He turned around and noticed a crack forming on the ceiling. 'The black hole is tearing us apart already?'

'The gravitational fields of any black holes are sufficient to tear apart ships if they get too close. Remember that black holes eat up even light.' Tanya replied without emotion, being ready to give a lecture on what the UNSC knows about black holes.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>T minus eighteen minutes.<br>\*\*Shepard and his small diversion team was advancing upon a rally point inside the Collector base. They were fighting more Collector security forces in their way as they approached their final rally point before they would go into the very heart of the Collector base. The Collectors were getting more brutal in their defense, but they were nothing that Shepard couldn't beat. As Shepard and his team finally entered the rally point, the entire squad rallied up, awaiting Shepard's orders.

Shepard activated his omni-tool to see how long can they still remain inside the Collector base. The counter showed that they had only fifteen minutes remaining until the Cataclysm is either destroyed or until it jumps away somehow. Shepard had rallied his small team for

an attack into the heart of the base while leaving the majority of the squad behind to hold off the Collectors and await extraction from the Normandy SR-2.

Shepard had chosen Samara and Garrus as his teammates to accompany him into the heart and made an impressive speech.

'We have lost some good people. They gave everything to get us here. It's up to us to make it mean something and do them justice. The Collectors, the Reapers â€" they're not a threat to us. They're a threat to everyone and everything in the galaxy. Those are the lives that we are fighting for, that is the scale of this fight.' Shepard looked over his team, seeing hope in their eyes and the will to fight rise yet again after being demoralized from a long fight against the Collectors. 'It's been a long journey, no one's coming out without scars, but it all comes down to this very moment. We win or lose everything in the next few minutes. Make me proud, make the galaxy proud and most of all, make yourselves proud.' Shepard looked proudly over his team when his platform began moving away from them. The platform went onwards to the center of the station and Shepard was continuously being ambushed by Collector drones as well as Harbinger's upgraded drones and husks â€" the walking dead.

Three minutes later, Shepard had encountered a real monstrosity â€" a Reaper being made out of living, breathing Humans. This proto-Reaper was invulnerable to any sort of small-arms fire or even micro-nukes such as the ones fired from the M-920 'Cain'. Shepard saw tubes leading into the monster and ordered his team to destroy them. They were rather vulnerable to small-arms fire and destroyed quite easily, forcing the Reaper to plummet downwards into the very bottom of the black hole. Shepard had a specific objective â€" destroy the Collector base to end the monstrosities occurring in there and he approached what appeared to be a control module. He was attaching a device to him when the man he most hated contacted him from Garrus' communicator â€" the Illusive Man.

'Shepard, you've done it! You have access to the heart of this very base and imagine what Humanity could achieve if we could take control of it!' The Illusive Man looked proud of Shepard's achievement. He wanted to convince Shepard to follow his bidding.

'Illusive Man.' Shepard stood up, looking disappointed and angry at the Illusive Man. 'What do you want?'

'Shepard, I want you to keep this station. Imagine the technology that we could achieve! Imagine what we could do! This is the only weapon against the Reapers, Shepard, and you can help the galaxy by saving it!' The Illusive Man lighted a cigarette while talking to Shepard. 'You can create a radiation purge and kill any remaining Collectors onboard. Think carefully, Shepard.'

Shepard began to consider his options. He could hand the station over to the UNSC instead of Cerberus, but Chris had warned that Captain Sandman would kill Shepard if he decides to hand anything over to the UNSC, because if something like that gets into UNSC's hands, ONI may lock it down and take everything for themselves, doing sick experiments of their own. Shepard knew that handing the base over to Cerberus would be very bad for Humanity and for all the aliens in the Galaxy. After thinking for a few seconds, he came upon a decision â€" complete destruction of the base. He configured his small device to

send out a signal to the Eezo core of the station to explode and take the base with it.

'Shepard, what are you doing? You don't realize what you're letting go!' The Illusive Man tried arguing against Shepard's decision when he noticed that Shepard was trying to destroy the base and looked very angrily.

'Get the fuck out of my face, Illusive Man.' Shepard shouted back and Garrus immediately killed the line. Meanwhile, Shepard had finished setting the device and got ready to evacuate from the base, when something began shaking everything. It was the proto-Reaper that tried climbing back up to kill the ones who tried to kill it and it sounded really pissed off.

'By the spirits!' Garrus gasped in shock when he noticed the monstrosity popping up. He prepared his gun to fire on it, but Shepard had a better idea. He wanted to call upon the UNSC Cataclysm's powerful main guns to open up a massive hole and put an extremely heavy depleted uranium shell into the very heart of the proto-Reaper. He took a target designator that can paint targets for UNSC weapons and opened up a communications line to the Cataclysm. The signal was barely holding up, but it was good enough to send a message.

'Cataclysm, this is Shepard. I need your help in taking out a live Reaper! I am painting a target right now! I repeat, I am providing coordinates for immediate fire support against a live Reaper!'

The Cataclysm had received the message and was discussing how they could help. Their required escape velocity was already above seventy percent of the speed of light and they knew they could not use MAC guns.

'Tanya, prep the MAC guns and line the ship up with the Collector Base!' Chris approached the holotable that immediately created an image of the galactic core with the Collector base being painted red.

'I can line the ship up only for several seconds, but we can't fire MAC guns. The shells **will** get sucked into the black hole or even thrown right back against us as our escape velocity is already two hundred and eighteen thousand kilometers per second and our shields are barely holding the gravity back from tearing the ship apart. If we fire a shell, it will immediately get sucked back in.' Tanya was considering options when she remembered a secret weapon that the Monitor of the Forerunner homeworld had left in the Cataclysm. 'We have another option, though. Chris, it's a Forerunner beam cannon that fires a beam of extremely powerful energy at nearly the speed of light.'

'Woahâ€¦ what's the charge time?' Chris sounded happy that the Cataclysm actually has a Forerunner weapon. At least, he was happy enough to forget about the ship's fate.

'Two seconds charge time. I can keep the ship lined up for seven seconds and the distance between us and the Collector base is small enough for the beam to reach in less than a second.' Tanya answered, looking curious to see how the weapon performs.

'Do what you must. Help Shepard!'' Chris gave the order, forgetting about everything and sitting down, waiting for results. Tanya began executing the order without delay and began configuring the Cataclysm's thrusters to turn the ship slightly while charging up the secret weapon. The weapon emitted an extremely bright, blue light shortly before firing its bright blue stream of energy at the station that slipped past its kinetic barriers effortlessly and destroyed its hull plating, rushing straight inside and ramming the Reaper with an as of yet unknown yield, big enough to destroy the Reaper in one shot. The following explosion destabilized the platforms inside the base which began flying around chaotically, ramming into each other and even into the one Shepard and his team was on.

While Shepard and his team was recovering from the chaos, Chris and his crew began focusing on escaping as they had only two minutes remaining until their shields collapse and the ship gets crushed and stretched out into the black hole.

'Alright, Tanya, let's get out of here. Open up a slipspace portal and light up the engines to maximum possible thrust!'' Chris stood up, hoping that his plan would work while the ship began cracking apart again. Even the bridge's frontal observation window was showing cracks in it.

'Alright, but I warn you, this might not help as we're danger close to the event horizon already.' Tanya spun up the FTL drive of the Cataclysm and opened up a slipspace portal in front of the ship, but something was very wrong. Instead of accelerating towards it, the ship was flying away from it as the distance was getting larger and larger every second.

'Tanya!'' Chris shouted in fear.

'I'm trying, Chris, but the gravity is too strong!'' The AI kept trying to push the maximum out of the engines, but she nearly burned the engines out. 'We can't reach it.' Tanya reported in disappointment while the slipspace portal collapsed from the gravity.

'Then this is itâ€¦ we're done for.' John B-201 joined the conversation, expressing his pessimism in the situation at hand. The atmosphere in the bridge grew extremely intense as everyone realized their fate, beginning to feel the massive gravity squashing them together and tearing them apart.

The supermassive black hole's gravity nearly sucked away the Cataclysm's energy shielding and already began stretching the Cataclysm, slowly, but surely sucking it in the singularity, but the pessimistic silence was disturbed when Tali shouted out.

'Wait! Turn the ship around facing towards the black hole!'' Tali shouted in hopes that her plan would work.

'Are you crazy? Butâ€¦ heck, I think it's better to die faster than in agonyâ€¦' Chris sounded extremely pessimistic because he had lost all hope of survival, but Tanya seemed to catch on.

'I see your plan, Tali. Turn the ship around and activate the slipspace drive just as we're about to enter the event horizon. The gravity will pull us inwards into slipspace, saving us. How did I not

think of this?' Tanya looked optimistic, as her calculations had predicted a high chance of survival.

'Wellâ€¦ we know nothing of black holes, so I wouldn't blame AIs either.'

'Alright, Tanya, do what you must.' Chris sat down, sighing heavily, feeling his heartrate accelerating and noticing Tali sitting on his lap and hugging him. She was covering her face away from everything, hoping that her plan would work as Tanya rotated ship by one hundred and eighty degrees and spun up the particle accelerators in the slipspace drive. The particles in the accelerator accelerated to near light speed and collided together, forming a tiny black hole that was killed with Hawking radiation in a nanosecond. A brightly blue slipspace portal was open and Tanya had deactivated all the thrusters in the front that were keeping the ship from falling into the black hole. Instead, she directed all energy towards the main engines to provide what thrust they could and accelerate the ship into slipspace.

In three seconds, the crew saw the result. The plan was working!

The UNSC Cataclysm was being pulled into the slipspace portal as it was tricking the black hole into believing that the object was being pulled into it. The Cataclysm immediately found itself in slipspace and being transported two light years away from the supermassive black hole where the gravity was not nearly as strong as near it.

The slipspace portal opened in deep space and the Cataclysm emerged from it with visible damage and cracks stretching all across its hull.

Chris opened his eyes and saw that he was still alive and that the space in front of the Cataclysm wasn't filled with extremely hot gas, but with tiny stars and space dust. They survived and the plan worked.

Chris activated the intercom system to send a message to all crewmen.

'Commander Chris to all crewmembers, we're alive!' Chris delivered the message, still recovering from the shock as he heard the crewmembers cheer and shout in happiness. He deactivated the system as his own bridge was filled with cheers from survival.

'Interesting how our ship wasn't sent spinning around the black holeâ€¦ actually, it wouldn't worked if we tried to slingshot our way around the black hole.' Tanya began re-analyzing the experience with the black hole, basing on old knowledge that one out of two objects can be ejected out of it.

'Tanya, time to live on. We're never, ever going near another black hole again. Take us back to Caprica. We've got repairs to perform.' Chris kept breathing heavily, but he knew that the nightmare was over. The supermassive black hole was gone and nothing could trap the Cataclysm anymore while it's in slipspace.

**\*\*The Suicide Mission was truly over.**

><strong>

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Well, if any of you try to blame me for inaccurate supermassive black hole physics then don't. Simply don't, because we all know that we don't know anything about black holes other than they're insanely heavy objects with an insanely strong gravitational field. Still, I hope you liked the chapter and as always, leave a review with your thoughts.<br>\*

## 17. Chapter 17

\*Some of you may think that this is dead, but you also may be wrong. And you ARE wrong. I'm back with a new, albeit pretty short, chapter of Reclaimers. For your information, I will be now focusing my attention fully on Reclaimers: Vacation, so once that's done, Reclaimers will continue on! Anyways, let the reading begin.

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\* \* \*

><p><strong>March 14th, 2554, Caprica colony, 0756 hours by UTC.<br>\*It was yet another peaceful day over the Caprica colony with UNSC's Battlegroup Foxtrot patrolling its orbit, however, the commanding officer of the UNSC Shield of Sparta, Commander Philips, had a mission to attend to. He had to find out the reason behind the Batarian aggression and their attempts to rendezvous inside a UNSC-controlled star system while being nearly hidden from all close-range and long-range sensor and radar arrays. He rallied the Fifth Flotilla that consisted of the UNSC Shield of Sparta and the UNSC Warrior of Japan, both ships being of the Autumn-class heavy cruisers, eight Strident-class heavy frigates and four Midlothian-class destroyers. After the Flotilla had rallied, he ordered a jump to Harsa, the Batarian home system. Arriving several minutes later, the Flotilla prepared to launch a light prowler in the direction of the Batarian homeworld " Khar'shan. The prowler was launched about thirty minutes later, after being prepared for a long-term stay while the Flotilla stayed in the very edges of the Harsa system.

The prowler approached the planet in slipspace as it used the cover of a nearby asteroid belt to leave slipspace and hide the energy spikes. The prowler approached the planet and engaged its cloaking field, hiding itself from any scanners.

The prowler's mission was to gather valuable data that might reveal at least a tiny bit of the reason why the Batarians arrived in the Caprica system and threatened the Systems Alliance as well as the Caprica colony. The prowler and the Flotilla were tasked with staying at the outskirts of the system for several days and gather intelligence as well as evidence of a possible connection with extremist groups.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Back at Caprica.<br>\*The UNSC Cataclysm was undergoing major repairs due to having its hull stretched out and crushed by the

gravity of the supermassive black hole. The entire crew was granted shore leave on a planet of their choice in UNSC space, but Chris, John B-201, Tali, Edward and Krilus chose to stay on Caprica and live on its exotic beaches for two months until the repairs for the Cataclysm are done.

On their first day of vacation, the team was taking a swim on the warm ocean of Infinity that really did seem to stretch like if it was infinite, yet washing the warm sand of the beaches of a waking up Caprica was one of the most beautiful natural sights on a planet that reminded so much of an Earth in the far past " an Earth that the UNSC is trying to regain, even with all the billions of Humans living on it. However, in the other universe, the team was focusing their entire strength on resting.

'Hey, Chris!' John B-201 spoke to Chris while the two were sitting on the beach.

'What?'

'How long will our ship be under repairs?'

'About a month or two" I don't know. Why?'

'Well" I'm itching to get back in action. And, John might return in a month.'

'Yeah, well, forget about that and just enjoy the R&R.'

Chris and John, along with their team, continued to rest on that beach. Chris and John were sitting on the sand while Edward and Krilus were wrestling with each other somewhere further off. They, however, couldn't find Tali, so Chris decided to move out and find her.

Chris was looking all over the beach for her, sometimes even in bushes, but he never thought of finding her sitting the Pelican dropship in such a lovely day. And that's where Chris found her.

'Tali! What are you doing here? Step out here. Don't be shy.' Chris offered Tali his hand to help her out of the dropship, however Tali didn't accept as she was too shy in front of him when no one else was around. She did step outside of the Pelican, however.

'Chris, I" don't know what to do. You four seem to have it easy that you can" leave your suits.' Tali began playing with her own fingers, trying to calm herself down.

'Well, just because you're stuck inside a suit doesn't mean you can't enjoy some rest and relaxation, Tali. I mean, look at Krilus. He and Edward are trying to find out who's stronger in a straight up hand-to-hand match and it doesn't look like they're doing it just for the fun of beating the other, but to improve one another too.' Chris then remembered himself and John B-201. 'And look at me and B-201. We're literally living inside our power armor, but that doesn't mean we never take a step outside. Sure, you don't have to take off your suit right now and feel the wind, but you can do a lot of things with us together even with that suit on. You should never feel left out.'



Tali looked at Chris with her eyes wide open from hearing him of giving her a lecture.

'You really think so?'

'Well, if the SPARTAN Twos can do it, then so can we!'' Chris lied about the Second generation Spartan program, because he didn't know how they spent their downtime if they did that at all and, fortunately for him, neither did Tali. 'Now come on. Let's go and do something.' Chris offered Tali his hand, which Tali accepted, and the two of them returned back to the beach.

Upon arriving, they had noticed that John B-201 was standing triumphant over Edward and Krilus, scratching the back of his head when he noticed Chris and Tali staring at him.

'What? They asked me to spar with them and I did warn them that I hit hard.' John slightly smiled at his 'victory' in a friendly match. Suddenly, he felt Edward move his arm beneath John's foot. He stretched it out in front of him and hit the sand, trying to signal of a forfeit.

'Uncle! Uncle!'' Edward tried to shout out something.

'Ohâ€¦ I guess you're surrendering.' John stepped off both of them and let them get back up. Chris barely held back a laugh when he saw Edward and Krilus get back up, both bruised from receiving John's punches, apparently.

'What's so funny? Ouch!'' Krilus asked, holding his hand over his ribs.

'What's funny? The fact that you actually invited B-201 into a spar!'' Chris laughed slightly louder. 'He thinks that spars are real battles and tries to go for a kill!'

'Shut up, Chris. In fact, why not we go for a spar, eh?'' John entered a ready position, expecting Chris to take up the offer.

'Pfft. Nah. We both know I'll take you down with all of my limbs tied behind my back and with a blindfold on, plus hanging from a mobile Longsword on a carbon nanotube wire.' Chris tried bragging that he was superior to John B-201.

John, however, decided to pull a trick on him. He approached him and offered his hand for a handshake as if trying to admit that he's inferior. When Chris fell in the bait, John threw him around like a sack of meat and forced him to land with his face in sand.

'Hah! Said the guy with the face in the sand!'' John put one foot over Chris's back, holding him down and raising his hands in the air. 'I'm better!'

'Oh, you are so going down.' Chris began to retaliate and quickly made a double flip in the air to land on his feet and knock John off balance. However, knocking off balance didn't work and the two of them began to spar with each other.

Tali attended to Edward and Krilus who sat down on the warm sand, trying to make the pain go away. Somehow.

'So, am I missing something? When did they begin to fight each other so aggressively? Is it because of me or something?' Tali was curious why did both of the Spartans begin fighting each other.

'No, they just love measuring their dicks.' Edward commented, using an old Earth excuse of fighting each other.

'I'm sorry, I'm still not very familiar with Earth terms. What does it mean?'

'It means that when two men are arguing with each other or having some sort of pointless debate, they're measuring dicks.' Edward explained the Earth term. 'Just don't mind them and enjoy the show. At best, some blood could be spilled.'

'You do know they heal ridiculously fast and if they would try to kill each other, they'd be able to do it right now.' Krilus leaned a bit to let both of them jump past him. 'And there they flew. Oh boy, if Captain Sandman was here, he'd so kick their asses. Verbally and physically.'

'I thought that John and Chris were the more advanced ones, physically?' Edward began discussing about the Spartans with Krilus.

'True, but Captain Sandman has at least a dozen aces up his sleeve. I mean, from what I've read about his combat files, he always has a way of fighting with brains, not just brawn.' Krilus wanted to add something more, but then he noticed John B-201 slowly slide next to him on the sand.

'Hi.' John greeted Krilus, humorously, before getting up and admitting that Chris defeated him this time. 'Right, Chrisâ€¦ you got meâ€¦' John approached Chris again. 'This time I allow you to feel the taste of victoryâ€¦' John extended his hand for a handshake again and swiped Chris's feet with his leg, knocking him off balance and causing him to land in the sand with his face again. 'â€¦ with your mouth! Ha!'

The team let a burst of laughter out as John yet again managed to annoy Chris, but this time Chris himself laughed while lying in the sand.

'I swear John, you're tricky.' John helped Chris get back up on his feet and all five of them decided to make a campfire and share some stories.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>One day later, Harsa system, 1756 hours by UTC.<br>\*\*\*'Eagle Eye to Commander, come in.' The Commanding Officer of a UNSC Prowler code-named 'Eagle Eye' was reporting what it found to the Commander of the Fifth Flotilla â€" Commander Philips.

'This is Commander Philips. Report, Eagle Eye.'

'Commander, we've found out that someone somehow was tampering with the fragile stability of the Batarian Hegemony.' Eagle Eye began its report while flying towards Philips' ships at the outskirts of the system.

'Who did it, Eagle Eye?'

'We managed to intercept communications secured on a heavy encryption. We heard two Humans talking about some 'secret mutual agreement' between Cerberus and an Intelligence office or something like that. It was very unclear, but that's not the most important thing we've found.' The CO was digging through the files that he stored onboard the ship. 'We've also intercepted these coded messages. It's Morse code. Our ship wasn't given an AI so we're sending this to you. Also, we've found several pictures and detected Human ships departing and entering Khar'shan. From what we know about Batarians, Khar'shan is off-limits to any outsider, especially a Human one.'

'Return back to us ASAP. We must return back to Caprica before'' Communications between the Prowler and the Fifth Flotilla were suddenly cut by an unknown event. Commander Philips, however, saw a flotilla of Batarian pirate ships approaching his force. Philips ordered his ship's AI to create a heavily encrypted channel to all ships of the flotilla, including the prowler.

'All United Nations Space Command ships, enter random jump coordinates and then reassemble in the Caprica system!'

With that order, all ships of the flotilla turned to random directions and charged up their slipspace drives, flying away almost immediately after. Every ship jumped approximately two light-years away from the Harsa system and made a secondary jump back to Caprica where the flotilla reassembled under more secure conditions.

All of the ships had accounted for, including the Prowler.

'Lieutenant, you'll have to send over those files to me so that I can analyze them and then I'll deliver them to Captain Sandman once it's possible.' Commander Philips continued the conversation that was rudely interrupted by Batarians.

'Yes, sir, all files are being delivered to your ship now. Are we still needed?'

'Negative, Lieutenant. Return to Earth and report back to Admiral Hood. Fifth Flotilla out.'

The Prowler departed Caprica system and entered the inter-universe slipspace gate, exiting in the Home universe, as it has now been named.

Meanwhile, Commander Philips began analyzing the data and found something rather peculiar. A rogue pro-Human paramilitary organization called 'Cerberus' has been deliberately destabilizing the Harsa system to prepare it for an 'invasion' or something similar to that. Philips knew that something was wrong and, with an unflinching resolve, he decided to keep the Fifth Flotilla the most active part of Battlegroup Foxtrot, patrolling the edges of UNSC

space in the Second universe while Captain Sandman and the Infinite Dawn are resting back in the Home universe.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>So, yeah, stay tuned for Reclaimers: Vacation chapters, instead of this one's. I hope you did enjoy this at least a bit, because... well, I admit, I forced it a bit, but don't worry. I'll keep my skills sharp once I'm back with the real main characters.<strong>

## 18. Quest for Answers, Part 1

\*\*Welcome. I sure bet you've been waiting for another juicy, action packed chapter! Well, here it is as a sign that I have returned! Dive right in!  
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\* \* \*

><p><strong>June 24th, 2554, Caprica, 1344 hours by UTC.<strong>

>On the bridge of the UNSC Cataclysm, an important discussion was being held between Commander Chris and Admiral Lord Hood about the pro-Human paramilitary extremist group known as ''Cerberus'' that has apparently made several murderous moves against peaceful colonies and space ships in a thousand light year radius around Earth Systems Alliance Space.<p>

''Commander, Admiral Hackett has specifically asked for the UNSC to investigate the matter, however, he said that we should avoid direct confrontation with Cerberus.'' The Admiral proceeded to clear his throat. ''I want you and the ships under your personal command to investigate Cerberus' activities and what's really being done behind them.''

Commander Chris saluted, acknowledging the Admiral's order. ''It will be done, Sir!''

''I will notify Captain Sandman about the mission once he has returned.'' The Admiral logged off from the communications, allowing Chris to turn around to look at his team and consider the next steps in his grand battle plan against Cerberus. He wasn't about to just stand aside and 'recon' the area.

''So, what should we do now, Chris?'' Krilus asked while leaning against a wall, but Chris, unshaken in his resolve, quickly answered to Krilus.

''We're fending Cerberus off from whatever they're attacking and we're doing it with all the ships I can get.'' Suddenly, Edward began staring blankly at Chris and only after a while said something.

''But, we only have ten ships. Wait, I mean, eleven in total.'' Edward said, waving his arm around and then pointing downwards, to the belly of the ship where the Strident-class heavy frigates were being stored.

Chris pointed at several ships up front, those that belong to the Fifth Flotilla and Edward stopped pointing and dropped his attempts to argue.

'Well, where should we go to first?' Tali stepped up, naturally being curious and Chris gladly answered her by pointing on the holographic star map. It was a remote Alliance system, pretty close to the Terminus, with a medium-sized colony on an Earth-like planet.

Chris activated the intercom system that notified his ship's crew and the officers on the Fifth Flotilla.

'All ships, this is Commander Chris. My AI is currently sending you coordinates for a singular slipspace jump where we must establish orbital security over a planet and investigate the event that recently happened on it.' Chris took a pause. 'We're heading in to kick ass and wipe the floors.'

He deactivated the intercom and observed the ships as they began prepping for a slip all the way to the designated planet.

After four minutes, the ships made a singular jump and arrived right into the orbit of the planet, where they found ships similar to the Alliance's ships.

'Alliance?' Edward asked, staring through the glass, observing the ships. Krilus then corrected Edward.

'Cerberus.'

'Battle stations! Bring the ship to Combat Alert Alpha!' Chris shouted across the bridge, and the ship immediately transisted from a state of alertness to a state of combat readiness. His ship's heavy weaponry immediately activated, from the MAC cannons to point-defense guns, everything was brought online and charged up to the maximum. 'Fire!' Chris issued his order and started running countless tactics through his mind.

After Chris's order was issued, the ships in the flotilla began unleashing a rain of hell on the unsuspecting Cerberus ships. Heavy MAC slugs, Archer missiles and point-defense guns were ramming right into the kinetic barriers of the orange-colored ships, quickly peeling them away from the mass of incoming shells and the high amount of missiles. The Cerberus vessels tried to separate from one another, but they were quickly overwhelmed by the speeding frigates that flanked them and took out their engines. In the end, the space battle was quickly over and the group of orange-colored Cerberus vessels was annihilated.

After the orbit was secured, Chris ordered Marine fireteams to assemble in the hangars and get ready for deployment on the planet. His direct order was to recon and secure the area from any and all Cerberus forces and the Marines had to follow it to the letter.

Soon after, the Marines began descending into the atmosphere of the planet, through its thick clouds that indicate a hurricane season. The dropships arrived on the planet relatively safely, they let the Marines out and flew back up to the ships of the flotilla. The Marines were dropped next to a deserted city.

'Marine fireteams, unite into squads and spread out. I want every centimeter of this city searched and right now!' Chris primed his Z-180 Close Combat Rifle/Asymmetric Engagement Mitigator (The Forerunner shotgun that he had access to since the time his ship was built on the secret Forerunner world that he found) and pointed at a single Marine platoon. 'You are coming with me, ladies.' He aimed the Scattershot up front and began leading the way. He was followed by Edward, Krilus, Tali and the forty Marines.

Their little tour across the planet didn't continue as peacefully as they had hoped. Soon they found corners littered with dead bodies, some that have already begun decaying, some that have fresh gunshot wounds. Tali approached one of the bodies to find out the reason of their death. She knelt down and activated her omni-tool to scan the body, while Chris immediately noticed that the cause of death for everyone was a gunshot wound into vital organs.

Tali, upon realizing that it was rather pointless to scan them, stood up and looked at Chris, who in turn, looked away, looking further down the road where he could see slight movement. He turned his head to face the platoon and made a gesture with it, saying that he wants the Marines to follow him. He began making zigzag runs from cover to cover, from one destroyed car to a piece of rubble, to another car and so on. Moving like that ensured that he would not get caught by surprise from enemy forces and that his Marines wouldn't get shot, as they weren't outfitted with personal energy shields.

The road he and his Marines were on was rather wide and pretty long, about two kilometers long and heading in a straight line until it curved at the end, and it was leading into the heart of the city. The amount of cars indicates that it was a highway.

'Be on your guard, Marines.' Chris announced as his motion sensor began picking up a red blip, an unknown target. He raised his Scattershot up, from his hip closer to his eyes and he began visually scanning his surroundings until he actually saw a person staring at him from behind a car at the end of the highway.

Chris raised a fist to his shoulder level, signaling the Marines that they should stop. 'We're being watched.' He informed on the comms.

The Marines immediately set up defensive positions and one could hear a vehicle approaching. He raised his head above his cover and noticed a rover with a cannon approaching the platoon at high speeds. 'There!' He shouted and pointed at the direction of the attack. The entire Marine platoon turned their attention towards the incoming rover, now supported by infantry and more rovers.

'Get the rocket launchers up front and destroy those goddamn vehicles!' Chris shouted while organizing a proper defensive line. 'Those armed with Squad Automatic Weapons must cover the AT units!'

While Chris was ordering the Marines into proper positions, he was starting to catch enemy fire as his shields lit up from the incoming fire. He took cover behind a destroyed car, slightly pushing it forward from his weight and strength. He checked his ammo counter on the Scattershot, even though he hasn't fired it once and had it

filled with ammo before, and realized, only then, that the Scattershot hasn't got the range, so he holstered it behind his back and pulled out dual Z-110 Directed Energy Pistols/Exotic (Boltshots) and looked at them, seeing if they're alright. Meanwhile, John B-201 primed his M-395 DMR and leaned out of cover to start covering the highway with rifle rounds. He was immediately followed by a squad of Marines who fired their MA5D rifles at the incoming infantrymen.

While a firefight was going on, Chris leaned out of cover to see orange markings on otherwise white clad soldiers. ''Cerberus.'' He whispered to himself and popped out of cover, firing his pistols as fast as he could pull the trigger.

He began walking around his cover and moving up to the Cerberus trooper positions. His shields were absorbing the damage that Cerberus tried to send his way, even from grenades and sniper rifles. He kept advancing, kept firing and reloading his gun, and walking in an intimidating manner that would make an enemy tremble upon seeing a man, clad in metal armor, walk up to them, unscratched by their weapons.

Suddenly, someone from Cerberus's side fired a rocket launcher at him and blew one Boltshot out of his hand, as well as making him kneel down to recover from the deafening and painful explosion that occurred right above his left shoulder. He stood up again, holstered his Boltshot, and pulled out his Scattershot instead. He started running at his enemies and fired at each and every one of them, shooting away their limbs, heads, and throwing grenades at groups of them. When his mag ran dry, he holstered it and pulled out his Kukri.

With his trusty Kukri in his hands, true violence followed. He began sprinting chaotically around the Cerberus troopers, hacking and slashing them all, precisely cutting their limbs off. Some had their heads cut in half, or slashed completely up. His chaotic movements attracted the attention of a modified M-35 Mako rover. Chris immediately turned his murderous glare towards it, and threw his Kukri at it with enough force to pierce the thin side armor and punch through the heads of the two people in it that were controlling the turret and the vehicle itself, respectively.

After his successful throw against the crew of the Mako, Chris turned around to see a heavily armed platoon of Cerberus Troopers still aiming at him. He quickly lifted a dead Trooper and used him as cover to regenerate his shields to maximum. After the shields went back up, he ran up to the platoon with the corpse and threw it into a group, while he proceeded to ram his way across the rest and use his hands in a close and personal fight.

Chris tore his way across the platoon, tearing them up, limb by limb, and punching them into solid objects with his brutal SPARTAN strength. When he ran out of enemies to tear apart, he noticed one Trooper that survived. He tore his mask off, revealing a head of something that he had seen before â€" a husk. Though, this one wasn't entirely ''huskified'', as he was still looking at Chris in total awe, and was able to speak normally.

''Wh-who are you?'' The Trooper asked with his entire body trembling in fear from the super-soldier who knocked him into the Mako's side.

'Chris, UNSC Spartan Headhunter.' Chris placed his hand on the Trooper's chest piece and effortlessly lifted him into the air, holding him up. 'What the fuck were you doing here?' He asked, his voice about as intimidating as his actions.

'W-we were... ordered to round up civilians.' The Trooper, not entirely indoctrinated and afraid of his life, quickly spoke, trying to save his life. 'We rounded them up... and, then, we... sent them to indoctrination.' The Trooper's voice was clearly shaky, near unintelligible, but Chris could understand what he was saying.

'Where were they taken?' Chris growled, bringing the Trooper's face into his visor.

'To a remote station, somewhere deep in Cerberus space! But that's all I know!'

'More! I need to know more!'

'I swear on my life, that's all!' The Trooper kept trying to negotiate for his captivation, instead of murder, but Chris didn't care for his life. He tore the head of the Trooper off, really justifying his occupation as a Spartan Headhunter. Meanwhile, his platoon approached him from behind.

'Geez, Chris, try leaving something for us to kill next time, instead of flying into a fit of rage.' John joked, looking at the bodies that Chris left around, disfigured, and especially his latest victim whose head was in Chris's hands, until he dropped it.

'Nope, asswipe, start shooting and aiming faster.' Chris turned to face John. 'We're going to have to find out where these assholes came from.' Chris was hoping to find a Cerberus shuttle and it was his lucky hour! A Cerberus shuttle was picked up by Tali on her omni-tool's sensor.

'I'm picking up a shuttle not too far from here and it's trying to take off!' Chris, almost immediately after hearing Tali's message, took an M41 SSR MAV/AW from a nearby Marine, and pointed it at the sky.

'Tanya, tell me when.' Chris was hoping that Tanya would tell him when to fire the 102mm HEAT rocket at the direction of the shuttle and Tanya, upon understanding what Chris asked of her, triangulated the position of the shuttle using the radars of the UNSC ships in orbit, calculated its velocity and distance and then counted down.

'Fire in exactly three seconds, Chris.' Chris began counting down and once it hit three seconds, he fired two HEAT rockets at the seemingly empty region in the sky. It was empty, until the shuttle flew by and caught both rockets that tore the shuttle in two separate parts. The shuttle was sent crashing into the ground and it landed not too far away from Chris and his platoon. After seeing the shuttle being engulfed in flames, they ran to its projected area of impact. Upon arrival, they saw the ship burning up, but Chris and John both approached the shuttle and tore open the doors just so they can enter and extract navigation data.



It was a one in a million chance for them. They saw that the navigational computer wasn't even touched and John rammed his fist into it, to extract the hard drive and deliver it to Tali. As the two left the shuttle with the content they needed, the ship exploded, but the two kept walking, without even looking back.

'Here, Tali. I know it's a bit damaged, but, can you get a look? Maybe this shuttle was jumping around without the use of starships?' John handed the hard drive to Tali. Meanwhile, Chris had ordered dropships down to the surface, that were being sent to pick up Marine squads scattered across the territory.

'We're done here.' Chris announced to his Marines, but then John put his hand on his shoulder.

'You're going to be buried alive by Admiral Hood. He specifically said that we shouldn't annihilate an entire fleet and then murder a company of Troopers.'

'Don't sweat it. I'm sure he'd put in a good word for our actions in our next report.' Chris's aura of confidence shined over his Headhunter friend. The two of them turned to the sight of a group of dropships heading down from the clouds to pick them up. 'We're going to murder every Cerberus Trooper that we come across and there's nothing that will stop up.'

\* \* \*

><p><strong>I've got news for you all. Because of side jobs and school, I won't be able to push out chapters as fast as I have been able to before this long pause between Chapter 17 and Chapter 18. Also, Chapter 19 will feature the premiere of two new, fresh characters that will add something of their own to the playing field, aboard the most powerful ship of Battlegroup Phoenix. Yes, Battlegroup Foxtrot is going to be renamed to Battlegroup Phoenix.<strong>

## 19. Deception

\*\*Hello readers. I am so happy to see the amount of favorites and follows increase every day, as well as the amount of views rise up. I'm really glad to see that people are taking a notice of my fanfic! Anyway, on with the chapter, right?><strong>

\* \* \*

><p><strong>July 20th, 2554, 0534 hours by UTC.<br>\*\*''All systems check and the ship is ready for active duty once again.' An Engineering officer reported in, starting the day with perfect news of the situation aboard the UNSC Infinite Dawn.

'Navigation, move us out of the drydock and establish geo-sync orbit above the Northern Atlantic. We're having an influx of greenhorns and new vehicles and we can't deploy while we haven't received some FNGs.' The Captain's order was clear as day and the navigation's officer executed it immediately. Meanwhile, the Captain wanted to greet the Fucking New Guys personally and walked away from the

bridge, heading for a tram station that would take him to the main hangar bay.

While the Captain was on his way to the main hangar, the Marine recruits that were packed inside the dropships were making several laps around the Infinite Dawn. The pilots were letting them get a good view of the ship they're going to be serving on from now on.

As soon as the Pelican dropships had finished their runs around the Infinite Dawn, they finally flew inside the main hangar, where Captain Sandman and a fireteam of Marines were awaiting their arrival. As soon as the Pelicans touched down to the floor of the hangar, the doors opened and the Marines climbed out, in an orderly fashion. Among the crowd of nearly seven hundred new guys, Captain Sandman immediately noticed two seasoned soldiers â€" Staff Sergeant Elizabeth Holland and Second Lieutenant Jeromy Storm. Holland was a short female, with long red hair and really bright blue eyes, while Storm was a male of average height with short, dark hair and blue eyes. John had read up their personal files about a day ago, when he was falling asleep at his desk in his private quarters, trying to fill out paperwork that HIGHCOM forced on him.

'Marines!' Spartan Taylor arrived into the hangar, announcing it to everyone in her commanding voice. 'Get in line!' Taylor stood next to the Captain's side and then whispered something into his ear. 'No need to thank me for getting them ready.'

John merely smirked, but then returned back to reality. He observed the new recruits and then improvised a short speech.

'Welcome, recruits, aboard the UNSC Infinite Dawn, the second Infinity-class warship, designed especially for direct, head-to-head combat with the enemy. As you may have been briefed, our mission is to explore and establish contact with species beyond a trans-dimensional slipspace gateway on the outskirts of the Sol system.' John paused for a moment and then cleared his throat to continue his speech. 'Your briefing did not include any mentions of violent alien species and crazed Human extremists, much like the Innies. All of this is not going to be your problem once you've tasted your first battle, which will come on the first deployment after the ship leaves Earth.' John realized his speech went from mediocre to bad in about a second, so he tried to end it as fast as he could. 'All of you, settle in your beds, get used to your buddies and the other Marines, and we'll all feel like one big family. Dismissed.'

John scratched the back of his head, thinking about his awful speech, until he was disturbed by the two experienced Marines that he had noticed earlier. The two of them approached him up close and saluted.

'Sir!' Both said in unison.

'At ease. What is it, Sergeant Holland, Lieutenant Storm?' Both of them looked at each other, seemingly trying to communicate and decide who'd be the first to talk.

'Um, Captain, Iâ€¦' Elizabeth was trying her best to talk to her superior officer, but Storm saved her from being awkwardly stared at, by intervening.

'Captain, we want to inform you that we've been through our personal hell and back.' Jeromy Storm, a defiant Marine, tried to form words out of his thoughts that kept flooding his mind. 'We want to know what mission you have in mind.'

John looked at the two and then crossed his arms. 'You want to hear my plan?' He asked to be sure if what he heard was right. He received a nod of approval back from the two.

'Forget it, Marines. You're out of line!' John growled back at them, intimidating them as he stood closer with his height. 'Information is given out on a need-to-know basis and the conditions aren't met yet. Get to your new rooms, ASAP.' The two Marines, after the intimidation, turned around and were pacing to find their rooms aboard the massive warship. However, before they could leave, John ordered Elizabeth Holland to stop.

'Holland, stay.'

Staff Sergeant Holland immediately turned back around to face the Captain who walked up to her.

'I've read your file. Your father was drafted early in the war and survived several campaigns against the Covenant until he grew too old for frontline service. Your record, though, is even brighter than his. You even survived Reach, and Tribute, and then survived Earth without a scratch.' John pondered, convinced that Holland is worth her record, but he noticed that she was being very shy, acting completely innocent and trying to look away from the Captain. He placed a hand on her shoulder to reassure her.

Holland looked at the hand for a bit and then tried to look into the Captain's eyes.

'You're being shy in front of other officers?' John was trying to understand her character. 'Don't be. You're on a ship with people that will become your new family, you're on your home away from home.' He removed his hand and, without awaiting an answer, turned around to return back to the bridge, but the Staff Sergeant grabbed his hand and stopped him.

'Wait, Sir, I, uh... can I watch you operate your ship?' Elizabeth wanted to get a better feeling of how the ship is being lead and she gave off an innocent stare to the Captain.

'Yeah, sure, follow me.'

Captain Sandman proceeded to lead the young Staff Sergeant on a short tour across the ship's hallways until the two reached the bridge, where Rala was already waiting for the Captain.

'John, what took you so long?' Rala asked after noticing an innocent Human Marine female next to him.

'Giving the FNG's a tour, Rala.' John walked up to the holotable and looked around, observing the work of his officers. 'Are we ready to depart?'

'Sir, yes, Sir!' The Navigation's officer immediately responded

after checking the status of the main propulsion system.

'Then let's get back to leading our Battlegroup.' After John finished, a Communications officer approached him with a report.

'Sir, you have a message from Admiral Hood. He'd like to contact you immediately.'

'Alright. Get me in a line with him.' John corrected his uniform a bit and then stood at attention, waiting for the moment when he'd be put in contact with Fleet Admiral Lord Terrence Hood. Soon after, Hood's holographic projection appeared on the holotable.

'Captain Sandman, I see you're back on your saddle already.'

'Yes, Sir! You wanted to discuss something with me, Admiral?'

'Yes, I wanted to. About Commander Chris's latestâ€|'' Admiral Hood cleared his throat. 'â€| adventure.' He made quote marks with his fingers, indicating that it was something bad. 'He'll be patched in soon.'

Almost immediately, Chris was patched into the conversation as well, and stood at attention upon seeing his superiors. 'Admiral. Captain.'

'Commander Chris was given a direct order by Admiral Hackett to avoid engaging Cerberus troops at any cost, but, according to his ship's communication records and targeting system memory, his ship was the first to open fire onto Cerberus's ships in orbit. Although he maintained the element of surprise, the ground forces, upon encountering him in a firefight, managed to relay the message to whoever is leading Cerberus and now Cerberus knows we're on their trail.' Admiral Hood gave the report to Captain Sandman, filling him with details. 'Captain, I've spared Chris from a demotion, but I'm ordering you to punish the Commander for his brash, irrational activity.'

The conversation was followed by a moment of silence, until Captain Sandman decided to give the Commander a lecture.

'Chris, I know you've been a Spartan your entire life, I know you have Forerunner upgrades from that short encounter you had a few years back, but no matter how experienced you are, no matter how great you may think you are, you can never disobey the orders of a superior officer who knows what he's doing. Instead of charging head-on, you could've jammed the comms of the planet or secretly invaded the planet using the cover of night.' Captain Sandman then thought of a perfect punishment. 'You will be punished accordingly, as per Admiral Hood's orders. You will be doing support missions for the Battlegroup for the next month. These missions involve the delivery of food, meds and munitions to the ships and you will have to do it like if your life depended on it!' The Captain then turned his attention to Admiral Hood, who looked confused at the mild punishment.

'Are you sure that's an appropriate punishment, Captain?'

'Sir, you just do not know the Commander well enough. If there's something he hates, it's being in the support role. It's a torture for him, butâ€¦ Admiral, you do know he did the right thing and got the job done. The outcome justified his deed in this case.'

'Good, I hope that'll make him understand that we have to tread carefully in that universe.' The Admiral suddenly received a datapad from one of his officers. 'Excuse me, Captain, I have a HIGHCOM meeting to attend to. I'll need you to keep sending me monthly reports of your Battlegroup's statusâ€¦ and, your request of a name change for the Battlegroup has been accepted. Captain Sandman, commanding officer of Battlegroup Phoenix, complete your mission with the same dedication with which you've fought in the Human-Covenant War. Also, I agree with you, Captain, but still, we must maintain our professionalism, at least in front of the eyes of others. Admiral Hood out.' The Admiral left the conversation while John and Chris were left still connected. Chris looked at the Captain, convinced that he did the right thing. The Captain's following words, however, broke the silence and shocked Chris.

'Chris, you did the right thing. Forget what Hackett ordered you, we're not part of the Systems Alliance. If they want subtlety, let them do it themselves, but we're here under our own orders. We get information our way, which is the most efficient method.' John smiled and then looked around as the officers were pretty stunned themselves. 'You'll officially be registered as delivering supplies to scouting ships, but, I need you to keep digging on Cerberus' activities.'

'Acknowledged. Does that mean the Fifth Flotilla will have to return back to Caprica?'

'Yes, Chris, return them back. They have an investigation of their own to work on.'

'Alright, they'll be back shortly with all the intel on Cerberus that we've dug up. Commander Chris out.' Chris cut the comms and, moments later, multiple UNSC ships slipped in, with one sending intel to the UNSC Infinite Dawn, labeled 'Cerberus Activities in Earth Systems Alliance Space'. John uploaded it into his personal datapad and began reading, underlining important sites that are marked by Cerberus as 'Uncleansed.' What it means was unclear for John, but, he noticed that Caprica was on the list as well. Caprica's name had a text file with it, saying:

\_'Caprica is too well defended for a typical strike group. A hit-and-run tactic must be employed to overrun defenders and seize control of a vital planet that could help establish Human superiority. Strike group size must be larger than two full fleets to occupy defensive force.'\_

The Captain's reading time was disturbed when one of the crewmembers shouted across the bridge.

'Captain, our ship is being deployed to explore the colony world of Victoria in the 111 Tauri system.' The Captain's stare turned to the holotable where the system was being shown. Not too far away, it was on the border of the Inner colonies and the Outer colonies and the Infinite Dawn could get there pretty fast.

'Navigation, set course for Victoria.' The Captain put his datapad on the holotable and left the bridge. He was heading for the Spartan Deck to put on his armor. The Navigation's Officer immediately acknowledged.

'Aye, Captain.'

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Twenty minutes later.<br>\*\*The UNSC Infinite Dawn wasn't heading at its fastest, but it still arrived right in orbit of Victoria. The ship's radar and LIDAR were picking up strange readings from the planet, like if a battle was at full force on the surface.

'28th Marine Battalion, prep for deployment onto the surface. I want you all reporting to your team leaders and then load up into dropships ASAP.' Captain John's voice broke the silence that was clouding the ship, but, suddenly, the ship's alarms rang. Multiple repurposed freighters were heading in the direction of the Infinite Dawn.

'Incoming New Colonial Alliance freighters. They're on a direct course for us.' One of the officers on the bridge announced. 'Every Marine besides the 28th must report to battle stations. Prepare to repel all boarders. Spartans, assist the Marines.'

Meanwhile, in the main hangar, the entire 28th had assembled into dropships and Captain John had just appeared, along with Fireteam Dagger from the Spartan unit known as Jaeger Company. As he approached his personal Pelican, he observed that the Marines already began departure. After that, he jumped aboard the dropship and departed himself, with Fireteam Dagger on his transport.

'Sir, what's our mission?' Fireteam Dagger's leader stared into the Captain's visor, who was staring right back at him. The leader of Fireteam Dagger was wearing a Raider version of the GEN2 Powered Assault Armor, while his four subordinates were wearing EVA, Scout, Prefect and Commando versions. All of them were armed with MA5D's and M395's and their shoulder pads had a flaming dagger painted on, a symbol of their fireteam.

'Dagger, your missionâ€|'' John pulled out a holographic device that illustrated a picture of experimental 440mm cannons that were once left on Victoria. 'â€| is to either capture or destroy these field howitzers. Either outcome is acceptable.' The howitzers looked a lot like a standard artillery piece of the 21st Century, only about three to four times larger and featuring an autoloader, with munition delivered by a specially designed vehicle on the M808 Main Battle Tank's chassis.

'Sir, aren't they UNSC property?'

'Negative. Intel tells us that everything on Victoria is New Colonial Alliance property. They've illegally obtained small-arms and artillery weapons from Jackal smugglers and insiders in the Misriah Armories.' John hid the holographic device in his belt and primed his M395 DMR. 'Pilot, set us down at the first set of coordinates, then head forward to the LZ of the 28th.'

While Captain Sandman's Pelican was flying around multiple LZ's, the 28th Battalion had landed on the surface of Victoria and was engaged in a bloody battle with the New Colonial Alliance. Albeit fighters of the NCA were poorly trained, they had the numbers and equipment to make up for it.

Some of the UNSC Marines, having no experience in battle, were getting scared of the exchange of lead bullets between the two factions, but then suddenly, they saw a sight that immediately cheered them up. About a platoon of ODST's was dropped from orbit, and they immediately left their pods with their guns blazing and grenades flying at the rebels. The mere sight of the elite units brought their morale up and they managed to fire their rifles at their real targets.

However, the biggest boost was the arrival of armored fighting vehicles and Captain John Sandman, clad in his black MJOLNIR GEN2/Warrior armor. John stepped out of his Pelican and his shields almost immediately shrugged off a 14.5x114mm round, apparently fired by an NCA fighter. Regardless, John ignored that and kept walking up forward and began issuing orders on establishing a proper fighting position.

'Lieutenant Storm.' John called on a freshman officer. 'Tell your Helljumpers to get ready to breach the fortress once a loud explosion occurs.' John had thought that there was an ammo dump inside the fortress that the rebels had occupied. The fortress was actually an old UNSC Army garrison, and, according to old data, there was an ammo and fuel dump in the middle, in a well-armored building, made to withstand penetrator weapons.

'What explosion, Sir?' Storm asked, trying to take cover behind his pod from the incoming 7.62x51mm shells.

'One from inside the fortress.' John brought his rifle up and was waiting for the perfect moment to run to the fortress. He noticed that all of the rebels were armed with as-of-now outdated MA37 Assault Rifles, while some had the new SRS99-S5 AM rifles, as evidenced by how John's shields deflected an anti-materiel round. He finally found an opportunity when the majority was reloading. He utilized his full speed to get up close to the fortress and then smash a wall in just to get inside.

When John was inside, he found about a dozen NCA regulars guarding the ammo dump and, if he wanted to be as subtle as he could, he had to use a gift from the Sangheili â€" Active Camo.

Meanwhile, in the exchange of fire between the 28th and the NCA regulars, Second Lieutenant Storm was trying to lead the men of his platoon into safety, but there was none. The Battalion was dropped into an open field and the only cover that they could find was provided by M808 'Scorpion' MBT's and M12 Force Application Vehicles, AKA 'Warthogs', but they were rare and most of them were already being used as cover by the more inexperienced Marines.

'Get into cover! Share it if you have to!' Storm ordered, but then he noticed Sergeant Holland hiding behind his pod and trying to fire her MA5D at the NCA regulars. 'Holland, what the hell are you trying to pull off? Get behind a tank!' Storm kept shouting until his lower

thigh was pierced by a 7.62x51mm shell.

When Storm fell on the ground, Holland turned her gaze towards him, but then she turned her focus back to the fortress. She heard the Captain's order to Storm and she wanted to be the first one to reach him to help, so she was hiding behind the temporary safety of a drop pod. Storm, however, was being dragged into cover by his fellow ODST's.

There was a lot of lead being exchanged, the UNSC offered a wide variety of weapons, including the 90mm shells of their principal battle tanks to try and bust the defenses of the Insurrectionists.

However, while the Marines were pinned down just outside the fortress, John was having better luck inside it. While cloaked, he was brutally murdering the rebels, by slicing them up with his katana, snapping their necks, or just ramming their heads into concrete walls, until someone actually saw him.

'You there! Spartan! Stop!' The rebel shouted as he primed his MA37 and pointed it at the Spartan-IV. John simply did not care when he was being pointed at with an outdated rifle. He was slowly walking up to the rebel, with his trusty katana in his hand, with blood dripping from its blade.

'I said stop!' The rebel's attempts were all in vain as the Spartan was closing distance and was already within striking range. Instead of slicing the rebel up, he sheathed his katana and knocked the guy's rifle away from him. As the rebel was trying to run away, John grabbed him by his neck and then dragged him over to the ammo dump. He had one reason to do so; the rebel was wearing a Kevlar vest with, what was apparently a plastic explosive attached to it. It was a perfect detonator.

'Get over here, you so-called 'freedom fighter'.' John said and threw the rebel inside the ammo dump. He approached him, kneeled down, secured him in place and then rammed his fist into the rebel's head, to prevent him from escaping the ammo dump. The punch into the head was so severe that John's hand went right through it. He could see pieces of the brain on the floor, but he didn't care. He primed the plastic explosive instead and then ran away, into cover, waiting for the blast. After five seconds, the explosion ravaged the ammo dump, as well as the entire fortress.

'Booyah!' John cheered, but then he noticed that the attention of the rebels was aimed at him. They realized that he was the reason why their ammo reserves were blown up. 'Well, it's time to kick ass.' John activated his comms. 'Storm, get your Helljumpers inside! Now!'

Captain Sandman started running around, avoiding enemy fire and slicing the NCA regulars with his katana and shooting the further ones with the M395 Designated Marksman Rifle. He was slashing and dashing in all possible combinations with his rifle, by crouching, by running, by jumping, everything Rala 'Thenam has taught him about speed kills was used here. Meanwhile, Jeromy Storm's Helljumpers were flooding through the breach that John had created earlier and were starting to pick off the preoccupied regulars, but just when the situation seemed to be in the UNSC's hand, shit hit the



fan.

'Captain!' The Infinite Dawn's AI was trying to contact the Captain.

'Go ahead, Jessica.'

'One of the repurposed freighters has evaded our cannons. It's heading away from us, on a slipspace jump trajectory. After hacking into their navigations computer, I found out that they were slipping for Earth with a NOVA bomb aboard.'

'What the fuck? Send a dropship down, ASAP!' As the 28th was mopping up, John used this window to leave the planet, but, a wounded Jeromy Storm stood up behind him.

'Captain, you're not leaving without me!'

'Yeah, I'm not. You're wounded and need proper medical attention.' John looked up and saw the dropship emerge along with an escort of three F-41 Broadsword fighters.

Storm tried to argue, but John dragged him inside the Pelican and the dropship immediately flew back up into orbit at full speed and landed on the Infinite Dawn's main hangar. Meanwhile, the Infinite Dawn released its frigates and then punched in an intercept course to stop the NOVA bomb-armed freighter.

'Jessica, how the fuck did NCA regulars get their hands on the most powerful nuclear explosive in the history of Mankind?' John asked, while sitting inside the Pelican and getting ready for an EVA mission.

'Unknown. If we capture that freighter and its crew alive, we may extract some information. In the meantime, Captain, I suggest you prepare for a Zero-G mission.'

John prepped his Thruster Pack for action and double checked its functionality.

'Jessica, tell Spartan Taylor to prepare Fireteam Washington and Fireteam Black for immediate boarding action.'

'Aye, Captain.' Jessica proceeded to inform John of the current situation, as well as the entire crew. 'Attention crew of the Infinite Dawn. Twenty minutes ago, we've scanned a rebel freighter that was plotting a course for Earth. We've detected a primed NOVA bomb inside their storage room and now, we're trying to intercept that freighter and prevent a total catastrophe, to prevent the extinction of the Human race. All Sangheili crew members are to report under Spartan Taylor's command for immediate boarding action along with Fireteam Washington and Fireteam Black. The rest are to remain in their battle stations until further notice.'

While Jessica was informing the crew, the ship left slipspace and made a hard starboard turn, ramming its side into the freighter, however, the freighter managed to launch the NOVA bomb.

'Alert: NOVA launch detected. Target: Earth, The Sahara Desert. Boarding parties, deploy. Captain, you're up, because firing weapons

at it would be suicidal.'

'I knew that. Storm, can you fly this thing right next to the NOVA bomb?' John stared into Storm's eyes, despite that he was wounded. Storm nodded and limped to the pilot's seat. He immediately flew the dropship out of the hangar at full speed and tried to intercept the missile. Luckily, the Pelican was outfitted with an afterburner that allowed them to fly at much higher speeds for a while. That while was enough to intercept the recently-launched missile carrying the ultra-lethal nuclear weapon. The dropship's blast doors opened up, allowing John to take that one shot to fly over to the missile.

'You've got one shot, Sir! I don't think this bird will be fast enough for another run!' Storm's opinion made John calculate his jump with exact precision, even a millimeter in the wrong direction can have dire consequences and result in the death of tens of billions. John gathered his strength and activated his Thruster Pack. He had made the precise calculations and made the jump, grabbing onto the hull of the missile.

'Storm, get clear! Retreat back to the Infinite Dawn!' John waved for the dropship to retreat, and it did so, without questioning the order or the logic behind it. Meanwhile, John tore open the navigation and computer console of the missile and pulled out the manual control screen. He tried to tinker with it, in hopes to change course of the massive missile that was carrying nine thermonuclear fusion warheads encased in lithium tritride.

The navigation controls were locked out and John didn't have enough time to try and slice them open, so, instead, he rammed his fist into an area that, according to his slight knowledge in EOD basics, should contain the safety mechanism. He wanted to try and turn the bomb into a dud, however, he was unsuccessful, as the mechanism was completely removed. Time was running out, Earth was getting closer every second.

He thought of many different ways to try and stop this weapon, but then he decided to look at the explosive itself. He didn't believe that the rebels actually got their hands on the most well-protected weapon in Human history. He tore open the missile, then the casing, which wasn't made of lithium tritride at all, but from low quality steel. Inside was a warhead of a 440mm explosive shell which detonated when John tried to remove it, and blew him away. The explosion drained his shields entirely, and destroyed the missile in the process, along with the other eight fakes.

John was left floating in space, wondering what does this mean, until he received word from his flagship that Victoria was invaded by a larger fleet of repurposed ships. A while later, Lieutenant Storm flew by the Captain and let him get inside the dropship. He delivered the Captain back to the ship.

'Captain, Admiral Hood wishes to talk to you on a private channel.' Jessica patched Hood immediately to the Captain's comms devices in his helmet.

'Admiral Hood. We require a bit of assistance at Victoria. Dozens of NCA ships have appeared out of thin air and they deceived us by launching a fake NOVA at Earth.' John still looked surprised at the

clever tactic employed by the rebels, but what he didn't know was why they were scrambling everything they have just to capture a planet that is remarkable only for its natural beauty.

'So I've heard. I've dispatched a portion of the Home Fleet to deal with the problem.' Hood sounded as convinced as nearly every time.

'Admiral, what do they want with Victoria?' John's attempt was met with some success and, luckily, the information was not classified.

'Well, Captain, it was once controlled by members of the United Rebel Front, and thus, a safe haven for all the rebels in the sector. In 2531, when a SPARTAN-II team infiltrated their camp, stole their weapons and killed their General, the rebels were dispatched from there with ease and, apparently, they're trying to regain lost ground. The NCA is treading on thin ice, Captain. They've also tried to steal the UNSC Infinity last year with the help of a psychotic SPARTAN-IV washout.' Hood sighed. 'We barely managed to stop them with the resources we had, but, they're not planning on just giving up. Do what you can to secure Victoria and bring those FNG's back aboard your ship safe and sound. Also, I believe the Cataclysm has just arrived in the 111 Tauri system.'

John sighed, realizing that Chris had heard of the problem too.

'Sir, Commander Chris was delivering supplies to the 28th, as I had ordered. There was a lot of resistance and I told the 28th to dig in at the fortress that we managed to capture.'

'Understood, Captain. Secure Victoria once and for all, Hood out.' The Admiral disconnected from the call. John looked around and then contacted his bridge crew, also torn by curiosity.

'Crew, get us back to Victoria.' He then proceeded to contact Spartan Taylor. 'Taylor, squeeze info out of those NCA sons of bitches. I want to know who's supplying them, who are they working for, why are they struggling against the UNSC and everything else there is to know.'

'Sir, only one of them gave up without a fight and didn't commit suicide. We'll try our best.'

John then proceeded to head to the bridge where he would oversee the space battle while at the same time Marine Corpsmen attended Lieutenant Storm and patched up his gunshot wound.

Moments later, the Infinite Dawn arrived back over Victoria and assisted the elements of the Home Fleet in clearing away the floating space junk trying to invade a peaceful colony. The battle was short and the New Colonial Alliance was forced to flee in different directions, but the battle on the surface was just starting and John promised to end it as fast as he could, by deploying the entire Jaeger Company to the surface, along with extra Marine battalions with heavy fighting vehicles.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>And that's the end of the latest chapter. As you can probably not see, Lieutenant Jeromy Storm is property of Alpha

Draconis69, as he earned his right to have his own character in the story (And he also indirectly helps in the development and improvement of the story). Btw, can't wait to see what 343i has in store for us. Can you, dear reader? Heh.<strong>

## 20. Childhood Story: C-333 and B-201

**\*\*August 1st, 2554, UNSC Cataclysm's bridge, 0756 hours by UTC.**

><strong>The UNSC Cataclysm was exploring the Terminus systems under Captain Sandman's order, which was, in turn, negotiated with Admiral Hood under very strict conditions. There was no need for Chris's assistance so he was spending his time in the observation deck, near the bottom floor of the ship. Accompanying him was John, Krilus, Edward and Tali, who were exchanging stories from their past. Tali had finished telling her story about her past in the fleet and it was Chris's turn.

'So, Chris, tell us about your homeworld in that universe. What was it like?' Edward asked, with curiosity sparkling in his eyes.

'Well, I hail from a planet called Draco Three, I was born outside a city called New Albany, in a farmer's ranch. We were living a happy life, just the three of us â€" me, my mother and my father, until that fateful day when the Covenant Empire arrived on the planet. It was back when I was six years old that the Covenant invaded.'

**\*\*Flashback, 2538, Draco III, Outside New Albany.**

><strong>\_I was playing around near the beach, which belonged to my parents. Had two friends with me. Girls. We were playing hide and seek, and I was it. I was counting to one hundred and when I was done, I went searching until I heard something fall through the clouds. I looked up and saw a UNSC frigate tearing the clouds apart and heading on a direct course with the ground, covered in flames and splitting apart. Instead of the ordinary orange flames, those were blue ones. At the time I wasn't smart enough to tell why were they different, but I knew one thing: Something was not right.\_

'Chris?' One of the girls shouted while Chris was staring at the falling frigate which soon fell and exploded in a fiery inferno of molten Titanium and Lead. 'Chris!'

'What?' Chris turned around to see both girls standing and looking at him, as if they didn't see the destruction behind him.

'Where were you for the last five minutes?!'

'I was... uh...' Chris turned around and gazed at the fallen frigate which set off another explosion, blowing off one of the thrusters. The two finally saw the destruction.

'Oh my God...!' All three of them looked up and noticed debris falling from orbit, some even heading in their direction. They began running, panicking, yelling while debris and burned remains of Human bodies were falling from orbit. All three ran towards Chris's parents' house, but when they got there, they noticed that it was

being burned.

'What... no! Mom! Dad!'' Chris shouted and ran to the house. When he got there, he tried desperately to open the doors that were sealed shut. He tried kicking them open, using his shoulder to break them out, but he couldn't. They were made of durable steel, that was melting down now, as a fortunate sign for him. He stood back and waited for them to melt down, and when that was done, he ran inside, searching for his parents.

'Mom? Dad?'' He looked around, seeing no sign of his parents, until he ran into the kitchen and saw the horribly disfigured and molten bodies of his parents. He fell on his knees and began crying, seeing his parents like that, until the two girls outside began yelling for him.

'Chris! Chris! Get out of the house! It's falling down!'' Chris listened to them and then stood up. He looked at his means of entry and saw that it was blocked off, so he was forced to return to the kitchen. He looked around, searching for a means of escape, but his only viable choice was the opened window. He wondered why was it opened, lingered for a while, afraid of any bruises, but his survival was more preferable to a mere injury, so he backed up a bit and then ran at the window, and jumped right through it in the nick of time. The house fell down entirely as it was burning from the fires set by an unknown force. Unknown to Chris anyway.

\_I was a witness to a bloody battle between the UNSC and the Covenant Empire in the orbit of Draco III. The Covenant had some of their footsoldiers set down on the surface of the planet to round up civilians and murder every Human down there. Several Marine companies were sent to counter the threat, but the Covenant were just too fierce. The Marines were unable to mount an effective counter-attack, but HIGHCOM sent in SPARTANs only when many of the civilians were killed or eaten. After I jumped out of my own house, though, I met some of the aliens in the flesh.\_

'Re, nurk!'' One of the aliens spoke in its native language and pointed with a Plasma Repeater at Chris, priming it for a discharge into his face.

'Stay back! Stay back!'' Chris tried desperately to get the aliens off of him, but the other one came up close and pointed his Plasma Rifle at Chris too. Both were almost pushing the trigger, but a sound of lead bullets being sent towards Chris's enemies was a sort of a sound of relief. He turned to the side to notice four, fully clad UNSC Marines firing their MA5B's at the two aliens, peeling away their shields pretty rapidly. They kept firing until their mags ran dry and they reloaded, with fresh mags and fresh sixty rounds loaded into each rifle. Two approached the aliens and emptied more mags into them to make sure they're as dead as a dead alien can be, while two others approached Chris.

'Hey, kid.' The seemingly older Marine looked down at the child and knelt down, removing his helmet in the process. Chris looked scared to his bones. 'Hey, I'm just like you.' The Marine passed his hand to the child, trying to help him get up from a curled up position.

'Mom...? Dad...?'' Chris was pondering on what just happened. He

remembered seeing his parents dead, burned alive, and then aliens threatening to murder him. His entire house was burned down, debris and burned remains of Humans falling down... how much worse can it get?

'Look, kid...' The Marine sighed and took a deep breath. 'Is this your house?'

Chris responded without any words, just a nod while he stared into the Marine's green eyes. After his response, the Marine put on his helmet and then quickly turned his gaze to his side, where he heard a loud explosion and saw a bright green light.

'Private! Get this kid to safety!' The Marine, who appeared to be of considerable rank, primed his rifle, while the one that was ordered to take the kid away, picked him up in his hands and ran away towards a position that could be deemed as safe.

The Marine carried me on his hands for kilometers. For me it seemed like days as I was shocked, literally suffering from PTSD. I just... could not bear with the loss. I couldn't speak for days, just nods and shakes. After several more hours, the Marine finally arrived at a temporary forward operations base, about eleven kilometers outside New Albany.

'Marine! Report!' One of the guards near the base's gates came up, demanding ID.

'Private First Class, William McManus, 305th Marines.' The name of the Marine was buried into Chris's mind for years to come.

'Alright, you can pass, Private.' The Marine stood aside and lowered his rifle, letting PFC McManus through. McManus carried the little child over to a medical tent, where a doctor could attend to him, while he reported in to the base's commanding officer, a Marine Colonel who was in charge of protecting Draco III from the Covenant threat.

'Hello, little one.' The doctor tried to be as social as possible to Chris, but he received no answer. Instead, he took Chris's finger and took a blood sample, to secretly test if he's compatible with a super-secret project of UNSC's finest authorized by Colonel Ackerson not too long ago.

'So, you've lost your family?' The doctor kept trying, but Chris merely responded with a nod. The doctor smirked, but it was a very short one, and then he looked at the PDA on which the results of the test were shown. Chris was compatible. 'Look, I know you're going through hard times, but... you're going to get transferred to an orphanage right away.' The doctor hit a button called 'Transfer' and Chris could easily see it from a comfortable angle. 'Some friends will come over to transfer you to safety, on Reach.'

The doctor's words rang true as two UNSC Marines arrived and picked up Chris. They carried him over to a Pelican, which was unloaded, except for him and the two Marines. The Marines didn't talk much, they merely sat down next to Chris and waited until the Pelican took off and departed. Several minutes after take-off, they arrived at a cloaked ONI Prowler in orbit and the dropship landed in its hangar.

bay. After that was done, the Prowler slipped away from Draco III on a course for the Epsilon Eridani system, planet " Reach.

\_Of course, I was transported to an orphanage... temporarily, and that doctor wasn't a very social person. However, about two days after my transfer to Reach, I was 'recruited' by ONI into a super-secret project. I was immediately transported to what seemed as an ordinary boot camp... with at least 299 other candidates. That's where I met John B-201. We were officially being trained as part of Gamma Company and after a few years of training, we reached the top of Human physical and mental perfection, then we were given augmentations. A while after the augmentations, our Semi-Powered Infiltration Armor was given to us.\_

\_John and I were paired up into a fireteam, along with two other threes that didn't really excel at anything. Our first mission was, really, a secret one that I can't talk about, unless you want to be shot dead. In the end, we were promoted to Spartan Headhunters thanks to our proficiency and effectiveness while under fire. We were given our own MJOLNIR Powered Assault Armor about a few weeks after that mission and we were separated from Gamma Company.\_

**\*\*Real time.\*\***

>'So... what happened after that? After you got your... power armor?' Krilus asked, observing Chris's shiny, bulky armor. 'How much does it weigh with you altogether even?'

'We were sent on black operations all across UNSC space where the Covenant were stationed. We were tasked with destroying enemy supply lines and cause as much trouble as we can.' Chris smirked. 'With me inside, the armor weighs 450 kilograms.'

Krilus dropped his jaw. He didn't understand how a person could move in such a heavy piece of equipment. 'But this isn't my original MJOLNIR armor. This is just what the Forerunner Monitor gifted to me soon after the Fall of Reach.' Chris added with a smile and with pride in his eyes.

The group remained silent for a moment, until Edward looked towards John. 'What about you? What's your story?'

'Oh, well, just like Chris's, more or less. Except, I was born on Arcadia shortly after it was attacked. My parents were killed in a rebel uprising, I was orphaned and then recruited into the SPARTAN-III Program where I was paired up with that loser.' John B-201 joked about Chris C-333 and laughed a bit.

**\*\*Flashback, 2538, Arcadia.**

><strong>\_Back in 2532, when I was born, Arcadia was trying to rebuild from the invasion that it suffered in 2531 from the hands of the Covenant Empire. I was born around January, yet I can't remember the exact date anymore. I haven't cared for the last fifteen years. Anyway, so, my story begins a few months after I was born.\_

\_I was living in a middle class region of Pirth City with my family. It was still suffering from the heavy damage dealt by the Covenant during their invasion, but my parents were determined that the Covenant would not return to Arcadia. That's why we didn't leave the planet when the UNSC was evacuating.\_

John, before becoming known as John B-201, was sleeping on his little bed in his personal room while his mother was making dinner for the entire family. Meanwhile, he began hearing weird noises outside, but he simply could not move closer to the window to observe, as he was too young... until someone broke down the apartment's door. Little John heard footsteps of possibly reinforced boots running around the apartment, and the sources of those footsteps took his family outside, and he could hear gunshots while his apartment was emptied in a hurry.

About one hour later, baby John was feeling hungry and began shaking around, however, no one came to see him. He didn't hear anyone close by, the dinner that was being made was burned and he was helpless in his bed. Little John began crying and flailing his limbs around and then fell asleep, with an empty stomach and a massive thirst.

Several hours later, a group of men, dressed in black uniforms, came through the apartment, searching for any survivors. They stumbled upon little John, who was napping peacefully in his bed.

'You there. Carry this one out, ASAP.' One of the group ran right over to the child and picked him up in his hands, and then carried him out. The rest of the group checked around the apartment, only to find it left nearly in ruins. They ran out after their check was complete.

\_So, I was sent to an orphanage, where I was raised up to seven years of age. Then, I was recruited into the SPARTAN-III Program.\_

**\*\*Reality.**  
><strong>'And that's where I'm at right now. SPARTAN-III Headhunter, Forerunner augmented.' John looked around at everyone. They all looked confused, as his rather short and vague story wasn't as long as Chris's, however, he was the sort of 'darker' one of the two.

Their little group chat was disturbed when one of the bridge officers contacted them via the ship's intercom system.

'Commanders. We need you in the bridge as we've cracked a bit of Cerberus' intel and we can probably take an accurate guess at where they could strike or operate in next.'

'Officer, where's that?' Chris stood up in full height, and John soon followed.

'Well, we have intel saying that Cerberus has got a significant number of ships gathering around Horizon.'

'Officer, get us there, ASAP.' Chris turned to look at his closest teammates. 'Let's get up to the bridge. We need to see what's happening firsthand.' The team stood up and rallied around Chris, indicating that he may lead on to the bridge. Soon after, Chris made his way outside of the observation deck and went towards the nearest tram station to get back up to the bridge.



**\*\*Alright, readers, this took me a while, but here it is! Chapter 21 of Reclaimers has finally arrived.\*\***

\* \* \*

><p><strong>August 5th, 2554, Captain's Quarters, 1401 hours by UTC.<strong>

>Captain Sandman was spending his downtime with Rala in his room. He was watching Rala showing off a few hand-to-hand moves that the Sangheili use to quickly neutralize their enemies with quick, brutal and powerful strikes. Her little show was disturbed by Lieutenant Storm, who wanted to meet up with the Captain.<p>

'Captain!' Storm saluted, right after opening the door and revealing that he's here.

'At ease, LT. What brings you here?'

'Captain, I wanted to talk about my past with you.' Storm looked down, and John stood up from his bed.

'Well, take a seat and we can discuss that.'

Storm found a seat next to the table that John was now sitting at, and began gathering his thoughts and remembering the fateful mission that changed him forever. He noticed John pouring water from a bottle in a glass and then sipping it.

'Tell me.' John picked up his datapad and apparently opened a file containing Storm's data.

\* \* \*

><p><em><strong>PERSONNEL DATA<strong>  
><strong>NAME:<strong> Storm, Jeromy  
><strong>RANK:<strong> Second Lieutenant

><strong>AFFILIATION:<strong> UNSC Marine Corps, Orbital Drop Shock Troopers, UNSC Battlegroup Phoenix, 28th Regiment.  
><strong>DATE OF BIRTH:<strong> September 10th, 2530\_

**\*\*HISTORY:\*\*** Born on a farming world located in the Inner Colonies, Jeromy Storm and his parents were, for the most part, oblivious of the destructive war nearing Earth and Reach. When he was still young child, his colony was invaded by the Covenant Empire and it was swiftly wiped out, as the UNSC Defense Force stationed there was inefficiently outfitted for defense against an overwhelming and armored force with heavy orbital support. His life was saved by Captain Amanda Scott of the UNSC Hyperion, an ONI Stealth Frigate used for reconnaissance missions. Reports made by Captain Scott imply that Jeromy Storm was raised by her.

When Storm turned 18, he enlisted in the UNSC Marine Corps, on Mars. At boot camp, he excelled with most standard issue small-arms as well as hand-held anti-tank weaponry and showed off his natural ability to drive an M12 Force Application Vehicle, and an M808B Main Battle Tank. Additional tests requested by him displayed his ability to pilot a GA-TL1 Interceptor/Strike Fighter nearly as well as combat-tested pilots.

Over the course of the war, he was deployed only relatively few times into actual combat. Over the course of three years, from 2549 to 2552, he was deployed into a total of seven special missions against the Covenant Empire. During his third mission, in December 29, 2551, he was a replacement for a missing member of an ODSF fireteam sent into a classified battle against the Covenant, he displayed his skill under fire. He annihilated an entire Covenant platoon while armed with a M739 SAW, protecting his fireteam, and eliminating a possible ambush on Marine forces. After the deployment, he attended a ceremony in which he received the UNSC Colonial Cross for his acts of singular daring and devotion to defeating the Covenant. Several months later, during his time off, Storm was visiting his close friend Samantha Taylor with the intent of asking for her hand for marriage. During his visit, the Covenant invaded the planet and annihilated the entire UNSC Army garrison there. Second Lieutenant Storm's reports state that he and Taylor were heading for the UNSC Army garrison that was already cleaned by the Covenant. After arriving there, a Covenant patrol found them and shot Samantha Taylor in the stomach, multiple times, triggering internal bleeding and, according to official reports, triggering death. After this, Storm had entered a state of rage and armed himself with multiple firearms stashed in the Army garrison and held off the Covenant patrol, as well as fought a suicide battle with an armored platoon until UNSC reinforcements from the Epsilon Eridani Fleet, stationed over Reach, slipped in and, during a vicious battle, wiped out the Covenant invasion force. Marine forces found Storm, badly hurt, and immediately brought him onboard one of the frigates, where he met Captain Amanda Scott, now Rear Admiral, once again. After the battle, Storm was offered the chance to enlist in the Special Forces of the Marines â€” the Orbital Drop Shock Troopers.

In early 2554, Second Lieutenant Jeromy Storm, who recently finished Officer Candidate School, was redeployed to the UNSC Infinite Dawn, flagship of Home Fleet's most classified battlegroup â€” Phoenix â€” as a member of the 28th Armored Cavalry Regiment.

**\*\*STATUS:\*\*** Active

\* \* \*

><p>John finished reading through the report and even raised a few eyebrows. There is a lot of classified material, even though it wasn't specifically mentioned. Not as much as his own official military data, but still a lot. John's curiosity spiked about this 'Samantha Taylor'.<p>

'Samantha Taylor.' John finally broke the silence and looked at Storm, who was just sitting there. 'According to this report, she was meant to be your wife, correct?'

'Yes, Sir.'

'Drop the 'Sir'. We're not on duty here.' John smiled and put the datapad aside, then he wiped his smile off of his face and returned back to being serious. 'I want to know more about those fateful battles that changed you.'

'That's what I came to ask advice about.' Storm took a more comfortable position on the seat and then proceeded to tell his

story. ''I knew Samantha for a long time, and we developed a very tight relationship to the point where I wanted to propose marriage.''

''What planet was it?'' Jeromy sighed. Humanity's greatest victory was Jeromy's greatest loss.

''Sigma Octanus IV.''

''Hmâ€| the battle in which Commander Keyes proved how a single UNSC ship can beat four superior warships.''' John quickly remembered the reports of the battle.

''Yeah, butâ€| well, we were close to CÃ'te d'Azur and that's where most of the engagements occurred. The Covenant was sweeping over and searching for something that led them to the first Halo, however, ultimately, the battle was a total devastation for their fleet.''' Storm sighed. ''She lived in a private household outside the city, where we planned to spend our lives at. I arrived at her home and, literally right after I made a step inside, I saw fighters flying overhead and bombing the city, killing Army units and civilians, so, I told her that we should run.''' Jeromy wanted to just quickly summarize the otherwise detailed story that we wanted to deliver to the Captain.

''We ran, as fast as our legs could allow us, rushing for the Army garrison. We didn't know that we would get ambushed, andâ€|'' Storm slammed his fist onto John's table. ''â€| they killed her!''

John didn't want to inform Jeromy about the possibility of Taylor being alive. He has his suspicions after reading the Jeromy's history, as the reports are marked as ''official'', meaning that there could be unofficial reports as well. ''So, basically, the rest is in the report.''

''Yes.''' Storm sighed yet again. ''I have trouble forgetting about Samanthaâ€| I fear that one of these days, the memories just might interfere with my work and earn me a medical discharge from the Marines.''

''And how can I help?'' John thought that Storm was oblivious to his own suffering. Storm's answer made John raise an eyebrow.

''With all due respect, don't play stupid. You've lost more people than the average officer, and even those who were very close to you, and you remain in active service, and, people are looking up to you as an idol, though, not as much as the most iconic heroes of the war, like SPARTAN-117 or Sergeant Johnson, or Lord Hood himself.''' Storm smiled and then looked at his fist, which he removed from the Captain's table and then turned his gaze back to the Captain.

''So, John, how'd you deal with it?'' Storm's questioning really impressed the Captain. Storm has done his research.

''Took me a lot of time, two years. I tried many times to just forget about them, until, earlier this year, I finally drew the line and just forgot about it entirely. The last reminders of my deceased friends were left at memorials, so, after that, they are just empty memories in my mind. I have new friends, new soldiers, to care about and I can't spend my life worrying about the dead ones.''' John looked

down for a second, then to Rala, then to Storm. ''My advice - just move on and forget about it.''

Storm stood up. ''I'll keep that in mind.'' He saluted to the Captain. ''Thank you, Sir.''

John stood up and saluted right back to the Second Lieutenant, but then, he notices an old UNSC Midlothian-class Destroyer crawl right next to the Infinite Dawn. ''Dismissed, Lieutenant. I have business to attend to as it seems.''

Storm left the Captain's Quarters and left John with Rala together and, meanwhile, a crew member reported in with a datapad in his hands. Upon entering the Captain's Quarters, he saluted immediately.

''Captain! I have a message from Lord Hood to you.''

''At ease.'' The Captain looked at him and reached for the report that was being given to him. Apparently, Lord Hood was arriving onboard the Infinite Dawn himself for an inspection of the Battlegroup and was using the old, seasoned Destroyer as his means of transportation and another addition to the Battlegroup. ''You're dismissed.''

The crewman ran back to the hangar, where a Destroyer was parking up nearby and a Pelican then flew out, to fly inside the Infinite Dawn.

Meanwhile, John was correcting his uniform and getting ready to receive a lot of talk from the head of the Navy. Rala was determined to follow him.

John and Rala left their quarters for the hangar, and, right after arrival, they noticed that the Admiral was already staring at them both. The two proceeded to approach him and saluted him in their own ways. John performed the standard military salute, while Rala bowed in front of the Admiral. They received a salute right back.

''At ease. Captain, I came for an inspection of the ship.''

''Yes, Sir, I know that, Sir.'' The Captain was a bit nervous inside, but on the outside he looked as calm as the wind that definitely wasn't breezing around the hangar. Through his peripheral vision, John noticed two aliens approaching them. Mordin Solus, the Salarian scientist and Nyreen Kandros, the Turian mercenary that was a captive for a bit.

Solus and Kandros apparently had the need to have a short chat with the Captain.

''Umâ€|'' Kandros looked at the Admiral, not knowing who he really is until she read the Human text on his chest. ''Hood?''

''Fleet Admiral Lord Terrence Hood. Commander of the United Nations Space Command.''

After Hood announced who he was, Kandros, seemingly overtaken by instinct that the few weeks aboard a Human ship had taught her, instantly saluted.

'And who are you?'

'Nyreen Kandros, I serve as a Second Lieutenant aboard your Captain's ship.' Hood acknowledged the avian-looking alien's position on the ship and then turned his gaze towards the more amphibian one. 'You?'

'Mordin Solus. I'm here to talk about a leave.' Mordin talked faster than any alien he had encountered, and caught Hood unprepared. Regardless, the aging flag officer of the Navy managed to understand what the amphibian alien had said and turned to face the Captain.

'I'll be waiting for you right here, Captain.'

'Affirmative.'

John turned to face the two aliens and started with Mordin. 'What's up, Mordin?'

'Captain, I have to leave. The STG is in need of me and I feel like I should fix something that I helped upkeep all those years ago.' Mordin hung his head down, in shame or great sadness, John couldn't really trace, but what he did know is that he didn't have any more important reasons to keep Mordin aboard. He didn't get Rala's cure ready. 'Also, Rala' Mordin approached the Sangheili female that was clearly taller than him and whispered next to her. ' there is hope in flash cloning. According to this 'Doctor Halsey's' research, flash cloning has a very small chance of leaving some parts alive. Fascinating, isn't it?'

Mordin was naturally curious, but John was wise to restrict access to just genetics and organ research and anything related to it, so that Mordin can't gain access to more classified material. He kept gazing at Mordin until the Salarian faced him.

'Mordin, I'll get a crew to deliver you home to Sur'Kesh.'

'Thank you, Captain. This is for your girlfriend.' Mordin handed a data chip over to the Captain. The chip looked like an AI chip, but there was obviously no AI inside, so he stored it in his uniform's pocket and then signaled for a crew to prep for a long range jump. Then, he turned his attention toward Nyreen.

'Captain, I wanted to know about these Reapers I've been hearing from the Marines you've assigned to me. And the Covenant Remnant, as well as what those, Elites, call the' uh' Neru Pe something.' Nyreen obviously had trouble with Sangheili language, and John couldn't judge her. His Sangheili was bad as well, but Rala, since she was a Sangheili speaking slightly broken English, helped Nyreen.

'Neru Pe 'Odosima. The Servants of Abiding Truth.'

'Yes!'

Rala looked aside, seemingly annoyed at these overzealous servants that keep bugging her people with their beliefs. John replied to

Nyreen without hesitation, since he was in a hurry to get the Admiral off the ship and the quickest way to do that was to make sure that he's satisfied with the status.

'I'll explain later, Nyreen, right now, I have to show the best of the battlegroup to the Admiral.'

Nyreen performed the Human salute and stepped aside, but then she decided to say something else. 'I want to follow around, get a feel of the ship.' John nodded and Nyreen assumed her place on John's left side while Rala was to his right. John turned to face the Admiral once again

'Sir, we may continue.'

'Very well, Captain.' The Admiral turned around, seemingly looking towards the front of the ship, which he couldn't really see. The Admiral, his two Marine guards, and the Captain with his escort, were slowly walking towards the bridge. The Admiral was taking a good glimpse of every centimeter of this massive vessel. A long moment of silence followed, silence that was only interrupted by the sound of boots hitting against the metallic floor.

'Captain, you know how people say that the original Infinity drained our entire budget?' The Admiral broke the fake silence. 'How it drained countless trillions?'

'Official story.' The Captain caught on to the Admiral's obvious hint.

'Exactly. We've had war reserves saved up for thirty years. Quadrillions. Building an Infinity-class is nothing short of extraordinary, but, it's not a significant drain. That, and building it today costs only a few dozen billion credits, compared to three centuries ago.' What the Admiral said didn't relate to the inspection at all, at least for Captain Sandman, so he even asked why the Admiral thought this was important.

'Sir?'

'I know you're probably wondering why I'm saying this, and not asking about the ship that was built under my orders and its status. I'm saying that, if we wanted, we could build a whole fleet of ships like this, but the problem is that we can't mass produce them in secret and we can't mass produce Forerunner technologies either.' Hood went into a trance, that John broke.

'Sir, sir, I know you probably want Humanity to be the protector of the Galaxy, but we have other things to worry about.'

'Like what, Captain?'

'Well, for starters, Sol's infrastructure must be rebuilt and improved, contact with colonies must be re-established, our fleets must be rebuilt out of improved ships and much, much more.' The Captain stopped, and the Admiral did the same, as both turned to face one another.

'True.' The Admiral knew what he had to do, and the Captain's suggestion was just a part of what the Admiral knew. The Admiral

suddenly received a message on his datapad from Sol CENTCOM, demanding his return due to a rising situation. 'Alright, Captain, my time has been cut short. I'm afraid I'm going to have to leave in a few minutes.'

John thought of what to say further, and then he remembered reading about an experimental armor suit, being far more advanced than current suits.

'Sir, I've, well, I don't know how to term it properly, but, stole some information from ONI about a new powered assault armor which seems to have nano-bots built in it to help keep the user alive for longer.'

'Stole? Well, that is an offense.' Hood mimicked being serious for a while, and the Captain fell for it. 'But don't worry, Captain. The information you've supplied me has led me to believe that you're doing the right thing.' Hood then scratched the back of his head while he pondered on this new power armor. He understands that lately he's the last one to even receive the information, despite being the de facto leader of the UNSC.

Hood gestured for everyone to follow him, and he led them to the hangar where Hood's transport, a Sahara-class heavy prowler, just docked.

'Captain, I'll look into that. Perhaps I may get it delivered to you as well, because of that fighting style of yours. You may not notice it, but you drop your shields more often than others.' Hood remarked Sandman's high risk fighting style.

'One of these days it may get me killed, but that doesn't mean I'll let it get me killed.' The Captain laughed a bit, Hood merely smiled back.

'I couldn't inspect the entire battlegroup, sadly, and I'm not even sure if it's up to UNSC standards, but at least I got to see a part of the ship and I know that it's still up and running.' Hood saluted, receiving a salute back from Sandman and his two escorts. 'Captain, I'll meet you in person another time, but I'm still expecting a full report of your Battlegroup's capabilities, ship amount and so on in five hours.'

'Will do, Sir!'

'Good. Good luck, Captain.' Hood turned around and stepped onto the Prowler. Soon, the Prowler lifted off the ground and reversed into space, where it turned around and flew away while engaging its cloak. Silence followed as the Prowler left, and it remained there for a few minutes, until Captain Sandman finally thought of what to say.

'So, Nyreen, what did you want to hear about again?'

The answer didn't linger. Nyreen wanted to know everything about the rumors flying around the ship.

'Reapers.'

'Follow me to the bridge and I'll tell you. I have to make this quick, because I have to file that report for the Admiral.' The trio

walked to the nearest tram station and was delivered to the bridge. The Captain told Nyreen all the UNSC knew about the Reapers, from what data was delivered to them by the Systems Alliance, to their own research, which was very little, and was made up of mostly Lieutenant Commander John Shepard's research.

After the story, he told both of the alien females that he was busy for the moment, and began compiling a report about his battlegroup.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>UNSC BATTLEGROUP PHOENIX OPERATIONAL  
REPORT<strong>

**\*\*ROLE(S):\*\***

>Exploration<br>Defense of Earth and her colonies  
>Protection of Allied forces<br>Direct Combat  
>Fleet Engagements<p>

**\*\*SIZE:\*\*** 66 fully-armed warships

>1 Infinity-class warship<br>1 Cataclysm-class supercarrier  
>15 Midlothian-class destroyers<br>13 Autumn-class heavy cruisers  
  
>10 Paris-class heavy frigates<br>20 Strident-class heavy frigates  
  
>4 Vindication-class light battleships<br>2 Hyperion-class stealth  
frigates

**\*\*INDEPENDENT PART OF:\*\*** Home Fleet.

**\*\*COMMANDING OFFICER:\*\*** Captain John Sandman, SPARTAN-IV, UNSC Navy.

**\*\*EXECUTIVE OFFICER:\*\*** None, temporarily unoccupied position.

**\*\*SANGHEILI COMMANDER:\*\*** Zealot Rala 'Thenam

**\*\*SPARTAN DETACHMENT EXECUTIVE OFFICER:\*\*** Lieutenant Commander Alice Taylor, SPARTAN-IV.

**\*\*INFINITY-CLASS WARSHIP:\*\***

>UNSC Infinite Dawn, INF-102. (Flagship)<p>

**\*\*CATACLYSM-CLASS SUPERCARRIER:\*\***

>UNSC Cataclysm, Cataclysm-class, CAT-1<p>

**\*\*MIDLOTHIAN-CLASS DESTROYERS (15 ships):\*\***

>UNSC Sword of Damocles, DD-956<br>UNSC Freya, DD-701  
>UNSC Hammer of Thor, DD-702<br>UNSC Loki's Madness, DD-703  
>UNSC Guardian of Earth, DD-704<br>UNSC Heroic Son, DD-705  
>UNSC Silent Observer, DD-706<br>UNSC Allfather, DD-707  
>UNSC Aegir, DD-708<br>UNSC Mj  lnir, DD-709  
>UNSC Bifrost, DD-710<br>UNSC Silent Guardian, DD-711  
>UNSC Heart of Vahalla, DD-712<br>UNSC Eye of Odin, DD-713  
>UNSC Child of Sol, DD-714<p>

**\*\*AUTUMN-CLASS HEAVY CRUISERS (13 ships):\*\***

>UNSC Shield of Sparta, CA-342<br>UNSC Warrior of Japan, CA-343



>UNSC Camelot, CA-344<br>UNSC Avalon, CA-345  
>UNSC Valhalla, CA-346<br>UNSC Spirit of Midgard, CA-346  
>UNSC Excalibur, CA-347<br>UNSC Valiant, CA-348  
>UNSC Might of Zeus, CA-349<br>UNSC Heracles, CA-350  
>UNSC Whisper in the Dark, CA-351<br>UNSC King Leonidas, CA-352

>UNSC Devil's Luck, CA-353<p>

**\*\*PARIS-CLASS HEAVY FRIGATE (10 ships):\*\***

>UNSC Paris, FFG-110<br>UNSC New Paris, FFG-111  
>UNSC Dark Devil, FFG-112<br>UNSC Atlantic Storm, FFG-113  
>UNSC Executor, FFG-114<br>UNSC Tiger's Claw, FFG-115  
>UNSC Genghis Khan, FFG-116<br>UNSC Washington, FFG-117  
>UNSC Lincoln, FFG-118<br>UNSC Steel Belt, FFG-119

**\*\*STRIDENT-CLASS HEAVY FRIGATE (20 ships):\*\***

>UNSC Ame-no-ukihashi, FFG-600<br>UNSC Izanagi no Mikoto, FFG-601  
  
>UNSC Izanami no Mikoto, FFG-602<br>UNSC Yamato, FFG-603  
>UNSC Tokugawa Ieyasu, FFG-604<br>UNSC Ame-no-nuboko, FFG-605  
>UNSC Hades's Lair, FFG-606<br>UNSC Kamiyonanayo, FFG-607  
>UNSC Julius Caesar, FFG-608<br>UNSC Kamiumi, FFG-609  
>UNSC Kuniomi, FFG-610<br>UNSC Eradicator, FFG-611  
>UNSC Exitus Acta Probat, FFG-612<br>UNSC Ultimate Sacrifice, FFG-613

>UNSC Hiruko, FFG-614<br>UNSC Awashima, FFG-615  
>UNSC Amaterasu, FFG-616<br>UNSC Susanoo, FFG-617  
>UNSC Suseri-hime, FFG-618<br>UNSC Yakami-hime,  
FFG-619

**\*\*VINDICATION-CLASS LIGHT BATTLESHIP (4 ships):\*\***

>UNSC Fate of Humanity, BB-156<br>UNSC Jupiter's Wrath, BB-157

>UNSC Cerberus, BB-158<br>UNSC Vindication, BB-159

**\*\*HYPERION-CLASS STEALTH FRIGATE (2 ships):\*\***

>UNSC Hyperion, SRF-1<br>UNSC Warrior's Spirit, SRF-2

**\*\*CREW SIZE:\*\***

><strong>MARINES AND ARMY:<strong> 75,600  
><strong>NAVY:<strong> 57,400  
><strong>TOTAL CREW:<strong> 133,000

**\*\*MARINE AND ARMY INFANTRY UNITS:\*\***

><strong>First Legion (Legion I)<strong> â€" Contains: 1st Armored  
Regiment, 3rd Infantry Regiment, 4th Infantry Regiment.

><strong>Second Legion (Legion II)<strong> â€" Contains: 7th Infantry  
Regiment, 9th Infantry Regiment, 16th Armored Regiment.

><strong>Third Legion (Legion III)<strong> â€" Contains: 17th  
Infantry Regiment, 18th Armored Regiment, 19th Combat Support  
Regiment.

><strong>Fourth Legion (Legion IV)<strong> â€" Contains: 20th Combat  
Support Regiment, 22nd Regiment, 24th Armored Regiment.

><strong>Fifth Legion (Legion V)<strong> â€" Contains: 21st Armored  
Regiment, 25th Infantry Regiment, 28th Armored Cavalry Regiment.

><strong>Sixth Legion (Legion VI)<strong> â€" Contains: 31st Regiment, 33rd Armored Regiment, 34th Cavalry Regiment.

><strong>Seventh Legion (Legion VII)<strong> â€" Contains: 1st Sangheili Support Regiment, 6th Sangheili Guards Regiment, 7th Sangheili-Human Combat Regiment.

><strong>Eighth Legion (Legion VIII)<strong> â€" Contains: 35th Asymmetrical Warfare Regiment, 41st Unconventional Combat Regiment, 42nd Armored Cavalry Regiment.

><strong>Ninth Legion (Legion IX)<strong> â€" Contains: 43rd Heavy Armor Regiment, 44th Armored Regiment, 46th Royal Guards Regiment.

><strong>Tenth Legion (Legion X)<strong> â€" Contains: 47th Siberian Regiment, 49th Oceanian Regiment, 50th Light Cavalry Regiment.

><strong>Eleventh Legion (Legion XI, Shock Trooper Legion)<strong> â€" Contains: 55th Shock Trooper Regiment, 56th Shock Trooper Regiment, 61st Shock Trooper Regiment.

><strong>Twelfth Legion (Legion XII)<strong> â€" Contains: 64th Infantry Regiment, 70th Armored Regiment, 75th Army Ranger Regiment (Recent addition).

**\*\*SPECIAL, UNCONVENTIONAL TACTICS FORCES:\*\***

>SPARTAN-IV Program â€" 300 SPARTAN-IV's as of July 30th, 2554.<br>Divided into three companies â€" Bearslayer Company, Jaeger Company, Wolf Company.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Two hours later.<strong>

>The Captain had sent his report roughly three hours ago, and only now did he receive a proper reply from Fleet Admiral Lord Terrence Hood, who gave him schematics of the MJOLNIR MARK VII powered assault armor, along with all the specifications and little upgrades it has.<p>

John uploaded the files into his datapad, and began examining the armor. About ten minutes later, he went down to the research laboratory, where he handed the armor's schematics over to the battlegroup's development group - Research and Development/Battlegroup Phoenix.

'Scientists, can you get this done?' The Captain looked over all of their expressions. It was like something that they've never thought of before, and most of them were in a huge discussion, but the oldest one of them approached the Captain.

'Give us time, Captain. After that, we'll tell you if we can build it or not. According to the data, this armor has been built, but we'll see if we have the resources and technology aboard the ship.'

The Captain gave a nod of approval and left the laboratory, letting the scientists do their work. His next destination was the frigate hangar, which was nearly empty, save for one Midlothian-class Destroyer â€" UNSC Sword of Damocles. It was an old ship that Admiral Hood gave to the Captain and it was being refitted with the latest, most powerful weaponry available on the ship. The Destroyer was slightly smaller in dimensions than a Strident-class heavy frigate, so there was no problem for it to actually enter the frigate bay. He

saw a few scientists carrying a new AI called 'Sarah' over to the Sword of Damocles. A fifth generation Smart Artificial Intelligence.

He noticed 2nd Lieutenant Jeromy Scott Storm standing not too far from him, on a platform below, watching over the ship and how the engineers were welding new plates of armor on, improving the ship's structural ribs and enforcing its hallways.

'Liking it?' The Captain shouted so that the Lieutenant can hear.

'Sir, yes Sir!' The Lieutenant didn't turn around to see where the Captain was, but he wanted to know who will be the Captain of this magnificent vessel. 'Sir, a question if I may.'

'Shoot.'

'Who will command her?'

'I have one person in mind.' Little did Storm know that it was actually him, but Sandman didn't want to reveal that yet. He had a lot of paperwork to do just to get Storm into the proper position to command a ship. Instead, he made a smaller step. 'Storm, how about you become a Spartan Four?'

'Sir?'

'Think about it. You'll get the best equipment in the Galaxy, the highest amount of respect and fear.'

'They'll expect to see me giving my best in return.'

'Exactly.' A moment of silence followed. 'Your record and your actual combat feats are enough to get you started. Are you up for it? You can still get to jump with your Helljumpers.'

'I need a moment to think about it, Sir. It's a lot of responsibility.'

'Take your time.' The Captain took his last glance at the Sword of Damocles and then left the frigate bay as he was heading back up to the Infinite Dawn's bridge. He had mountains of reports to review, and a lot of paperwork to fill, to get Lieutenant Storm transferred to the Navy branch, instead of the Spartan Branch.

While John was doing his work, Nyreen Kandros, sitting in chambers two decks above S-Deck, was reading a new addition to the Galactic Codex - the Human-Covenant War:

The Human-Covenant War sparked in February 3rd, 2525 (UNSC military calendar), when a meeting between the Humans and the Jiralhanae, a race of sentient ape-like aliens from the planet of Doisac, went horribly wrong thanks to a nervous Unggoy, a member of a race of methane-breathing squat bipedal vertebrates, killing a member of the Harvest Colonial Militia. The war raged on for twenty seven years, claiming the lives of twenty three billion innocent Human beings. In 2552, when all hope for Humanity seemed to be lost, the Covenant had split between the Separatists and the Loyalists, due to inner conflicts among the Sangheili, a saurian species of fierce, proud,

strong, agile, and intelligent warriors, and the San'Shyuum as well as their Jiralhanae. Most of the Sangheili joined forces with the UNSC to effectively destroy the Covenant and free themselves. Unofficially, the war ended on December 11th, 2552, but an official peace treaty between the Humans and the Sangheili was signed on March 3rd, 2553, which effectively ended any and all hostilities between the Unified Earth Government and the Sangheili. For Humans the devastation was unforgettable, and some have grown to be extremely xenophobic, wishing death and destruction to any and all aliens, but for others the war turned out to be Humanity's greatest test, that they passed. After the war, UEG's military power has grown technologically more powerful. Day and night, tireless Engineers are working hard to rebuilt the UNSC Navy to prevent another war like that from ever reaching Earth, while scientists from Research and Development departments are finding new ways to improve upon glassed planets, reclaiming them for Human habitation. Perhaps the greatest result of this war is a warmer relationship between the Humans and the Sangheili. These two species are growing closer every day.\_

\* \* \*

><p><strong>I named the destroyers 'Midlothian-class' because of a ship named the UNSC The Heart of Midlothian. It seemed more fitting for the destroyers as a whole, and the occasional mythological naming supported that. Hope you liked it, don't forget to leave your thoughts. And instead of aimlessly bashing the story (like some of you do, and then get counter-criticized or ignored entirely) offer me some actual ways to improve upon. Also, 'A Spongy Boy' I made a Human-Covenant War Codex just for you.<strong>

## 22. Shock

\*\*Thank you, everyone, for following and reading this story as long as you have. Thank you for the attention. Here's a new chapter for you all.\*\*

\* \* \*

><p>For the past months, Battlegroup Phoenix was doing nothing but standing by, waiting for news from FLEETCOM, from Admiral Hackett of the Systems Alliance or from the Citadel Council. There were absolutely no matters that required overkill-level firepower, and there were absolutely no signs of Reaper activity ever since Shepard destroyed the Alpha Relay.<p>

The Orbital Drop Shock Trooper, Lieutenant Jeromy Scott Storm, was transferred to the UNSC Navy branch and promoted to Lieutenant Commander. Captain Sandman managed to get him signed up to command the UNSC Sword of Damocles, a Destroyer that he plans to keep in the ship's frigate hangar. Storm was also augmented to a SPARTAN-IV and in mid-December he finally relearned how to walk. The other SPARTAN-IV's didn't seem very fond of him, especially because they knew he and Commander Alice Taylor had something forming in-between them.

The UNSC Infinite Dawn recently received a new batch of Navy officers, ready to do their duty for the Navy and Humanity.

**\*\*December 21st, 2554, UNSC Infinite Dawn's Mess Hall, 2012 hours by UTC.\*\***

>The enlisted crew members of the flagship were enjoying their dinner time, when an unexpected sight disturbed them. The Captain walked in the Mess Hall, where thousands of crewmen were eating. Every one of them stood at attention almost immediately after hearing the Master Chief Petty Officer of the ship announce; ''Captain on deck!''.<p>

''At ease!'' The Captain said, making his way to the center of the Mess Hall along with a few recruits. Upon arrival to the center, he let everyone sit down, but keep their eyes on him.

''Attention, crewmen.'' John cleared his throat and observed the enlisted personnel of his ship. ''These new recruits,'' John gestured at precisely forty new personnel. ''are going to be part of our large family. Treat them as you treat one another, and give them a tour of the ship. Make sure they know their posts better than those who came before them.'' Captain Sandman's short speech was over. ''As you were.'' He left the Mess Hall, pacing back to the bridge, when he was stopped by one of the new recruits who grabbed him by his hand. It was a woman, of Russian descent, about twenty years old.

''Captain...'' She spoke, with a clear Russian accent that was audible in the way she pronounced his rank. It seemed like she was on the path to remembering something, and John thought she seemed familiar. Dressed in a typical Navy Battle Dress Uniform, with brown hair running past her shoulders, and with a face that makes him think of some sort of struggle to accept reality, she also had irregular green and blue eyes. She was also roughly 177 centimeters tall.

''Who are you?'' John was unable to remember, despite the answer just hanging in his head, somewhere.

''First Lieutenant Christina Orlovskaya, Communications Specialist!'' She saluted, but she couldn't hold something back. That something was a tear, a tear that reminded her of the past.

''Christina... Orlovskaya...'' John suddenly remembered rescuing a girl in Eastern Europe from a downed Pelican dropship that goes by the same name. ''You're the girl I saved two years ago?'' John's question received a simple nod from her, and she ran literally into him to hug him, as she had never managed to give a proper 'Thank you' for saving her from the Covenant Empire.

''I thought I'd never be able to see you again.'' She curled up her hands into fists while latching onto his Navy BDU. Tears were falling down from her eyes, and her words were barely audible. The memories of the day when she saw her family get killed and almost got killed herself were still crippling her to this day.

John couldn't get all formal on her, this wasn't the proper thing to do as someone who cares about those under his command. He decided to comfort her and wrapped his hands around her, even though it seemed a bit awkward for him as he was roughly forty centimeters taller than her and little did she know that he was actually a SPARTAN-IV super-soldier. John could hear people approaching, and he could see Sergeant Holland, the newly-promoted and transferred Lieutenant

Commander Jeromy Scott Storm in his new SPARTAN armor, Veso 'Yermo, a new addition to the Sangheili Guard, Commander Alice Taylor and a few Marines looking at what's going on. He pointed at the way out for them.

'Get the hell out!' He ordered, trying to protect Orlovskaya from shame. Everyone besides Storm left. Storm insisted on staying and finding out what's wrong.

'Captain, I insist on helping.'

John didn't plan on telling Storm to leave. He was a close friend after all. 'Alright.' John knelt down in front of Christina, and looked her right in the eyes. He ran a hand over her cheek.

'It's alright, LT.' After saying that, she grabbed hold of his hand.

'Thank you. Thank you so much.' She tried to thank him from all of her heart. She received a friendly smile back from the Captain.

'It's part of what I do, Christina.' He stood back up, Christina still holding his hand and Storm looking over them both. With his other hand, he wiped her tears away.

'Do you still need me in the bridge, Captain?' She got a hold of herself, but tears were still flowing from her eyes.

'Not now, Christina. Relax a bit.' John then turned to Storm, but realized his hand was still taken by her. She had her own plans.

'I want to walk around with you, see what you really do around the ship.' John didn't have anything serious to do, and he agreed to take her along. He returned to talking with Storm, however.

'Captain, any news on the Sword's final patches?' Storm was eager to take his new ship out for a shakedown cruise and then the ship's maiden voyage. John knew that the ship was done and, instead of saying anything, decided to lead Storm to the ship.

While the trio was walking to the frigate hangar, Christina noticed how Captain Sandman was significantly taller than Commander Storm, even while in his power armor. She pulled the Captain's arm to stop him and grabbed his neck to bring herself closer to his ear.

'You're one of them? The Spartans?' She whispered softly into his ear.

John looked at her, curious, not realizing that she never knew. He gave her a nod, calming her own curiosity and letting her know that the Captain is more than a typical Navy war hero.

The trio continued to the frigate bay and, when the doors slid open, Jeromy was amazed to see his ship finished. Five hundred meter long ship made of 2 meter thick Titanium-A3 battleplating along with sophisticated and deadly weaponry, respectable for a Destroyer.

Jeromy stood with his jaw barely hanging on to its hinges. John looked at the ship, then turned his gaze to the Lieutenant Commander, but, seeing the uselessness of trying to get his attention, he turned to face Lieutenant Orlovskaya instead.

'Are you, by any chance, related to Vice Admiral Vladimir Orlovsky?' Christina merely nods, remembering that there was a possibility that he died too.

'He's in charge of the Nineteenth that's going to arrive over Caprica next week.' When John revealed that her grandfather wasn't really dead, she was shocked and broke into tears again. This time, those were happy tears. She hugged him again, and this time, what she tried to say was much more audible.

'Can you arrange a meeting with him, Captain? Please?' John had no other choice but to agree. He had to personally inform and show the Admiral of the defenses around the planet, and now he had the task of reuniting a family.

'I'll do it. I have to meet with him anyway.'

Christina smiled and then let go of the Captain, who then turned his gaze towards Storm. Storm was still staring at his new ship. He still couldn't get over the fact that he might suspect of being inside of a dream world. John helped him snap out of his trance.

'You're still here? You were supposed to be inside the bridge a minute ago.' John laughed slightly, seeing Storm snap out of his situation.

'Oscar Mike, Cap.' Storm began running right for the bridge of his destroyer. Once inside the ship, he noticed that it had a strengthened internal layout. Not as tough as the Infinity-class's or the Autumn-class's, but tough enough to take a lot more pounding. He ran straight up to the bridge of the ship. Once he stepped inside the ship's combat information center, he began observing every centimeter of his new home. His personal seat was on an elevated position in the very middle of the bridge and he walked straight up to it, and sat down on it. Suddenly, one of the screens next to the frontal observation lit to life and revealed Captain Sandman on the other end.

'Your new crew is on its way to man your ship, and you will also get a fireteam of Fours onboard. In five minutes, I want you to activate your ship's thermonuclear reactor.' The comms channel was ended soon after, and Storm began counting down the five minutes that John gave him.

The crew of Marines and Naval Crewmen was quickly filling the ship and eventually the docking tubes retracted. The Destroyer was held in place by magnetic lock. When five minutes had passed, Jeromy ordered the activation of the primary thermonuclear drive and about a minute later, the secondary drives were also activated. The ship powered up pretty quickly and the frigate bay's door below the destroyer opened. The magnetic claw released the ship and let it fly downwards. Right after leaving the bay, the UNSC Sword of Damocles stabilized itself and flew up, right next to the Infinite Dawn, assuming its position there while the place it vacated was filled with one of the warship's

frigates.

On the bridge of the UNSC Sword of Damocles, a route was plotted in that took it across the entire Local cluster. It was her first maiden voyage after being reconstructed from scratch, which would be followed up by the ship's shakedown run. Shortly after clearing away from the other ships of Battlegroup Phoenix, the Sword of Damocles engaged its new slipspace drive and slipped away from Caprica to its first destination, the new universe's Pluto.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Meanwhile, Terminus systems, UNSC Cataclysm.<strong>

>The UNSC Cataclysm was hiding in the shade of space while scanning nearby territories for some 'unusual' activity. This included Reaper movements, Collector abductions<br>'Chris, we've pinpointed a Cerberus base in the Terminus. It's an uncharted system.' John marched in the otherwise silent bridge of the supercarrier out in deep space duty.

John brought up the holographic map on the holo-table and, on the galaxy map, he pinpointed an unidentified star system. Chris wanted to inform the Alliance.

'Send a message to Hackett' John interrupted Chris.

'Already done. Hackett's on his way. We're going to see what Cerberus is doing once and for all.'

And so, the crew waited for hours, knowing that a Systems Alliance flotilla is on its way to assist the Cataclysm. Several hours of sitting hour. Chris didn't like it, but it wasn't like he had a choice. He needed Hackett for this as Captain Sandman had made it clear to him a week earlier.

Flashback, One week earlier.

>Chris and Captain Sandman were on a communications channel with one another, discussing what Chris should do and what he should absolutely, positively refrain from doing.<p>

'Chris, the next time you find a Cerberus base, ask Hackett to come along. I can't let you run around and throw blades through tanks.' John sounded strict, trying to make sure that Chris follows UNSC regulations and protocols even though it was hard for a man who hasn't followed them for a while.

'Captain, I can't guarantee that I won't hold back. Action is in my blood.' Chris tried justifying himself, but the Captain pretended that he wasn't listening to it.

'Don't want to hear it. Do as Hackett says, Captain Sandman out.' The Captain cut the comms with Chris, letting him know his stance.

'Wellâ€¦ fuck.'

Real time, seven hours later.

>Hackett and eight warships, seven cruisers and one Dreadnought, arrived in the system undetected and regrouped with the UNSC



Cataclysm. With the coordinates given, the nine ships proceeded to the deep space station. When they came in visual range, they saw how massive it was. Several kilometers large, it must've taken several years for Cerberus to assemble in secret, but given the funds that Cerberus must hold, it was entirely feasible for them.<p>

Then, out of nowhere seventeen Cerberus cruisers jumped in, right in front of the station, and assumed firing positions. Hackett issued a flotilla-wide red alert while it was closing the gap. The two flotillas were forty thousand kilometers away from one another.

'All ships, battle formation!'

The Cataclysm, however, had other plans. It flew in front of Hackett's flotilla and covered it entirely with its hull. Chris knew that the Cataclysm's shields won't drop from the salvo and he used it to their opportunity. He ordered the broadside mass drivers to charge up and take aim while Hackett's ships organized themselves tightly behind the Cataclysm to let the supercarrier absorb the salvo which was already fired and heading its way.

Seventeen fifteen kiloton shells flew at the Cataclysm, none of them did any damage. The kinetic energy was absorbed by the shields and the shockwaves were dampened by the inertial dampeners. By the time the second salvo was ready, the Cataclysm's starboard mass drivers were primed for battle and the first salvo was released, firing overwhelming amounts of depleted uranium slugs in a matter of seconds, followed up by Archer missiles. This quickly drained Cerberus's fleet's shields.

'All ships, emerge from cover and open fire!' Hackett tried assisting the Cataclysm and his ships flew out and quickly took aim. The Dreadnought fired first, landing a few critical hits against two Cerberus cruisers. Meanwhile, the UNSC Cataclysm swiftly turned around to line up its awe-inspiring MAC barrels.

'Let them have it!' Chris announced over comms and the MAC's lit up, unleashing massive depleted uranium slugs that quickly closed the gap and smashed right through the cruisers, shattering them to pieces and triggering them to explode. However, Cerberus didn't sit by idly. They fired back and managed to disable three Alliance cruisers before being completely wiped out.

'There, we're free to move up.' Chris, in a direct comms channel to Admiral Hackett, observed as his ship moved up and rapidly cleared past the debris field as it prepared to line up its hangar bay with the station. Hackett gave a clear order to secure a landing zone for Alliance Marines. Chris boarded one of the three Pelican dropships and prepared to help his own Marines, as well as took John B-201 along for the ride.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Three hours later, Sol System, Jupiter's orbit, 0656 hours by UTC.<strong>

>The UNSC Sword of Damocles, DD-956, has finished its maiden voyage five hours ago and started its shakedown run, testing all the systems. Jeromy purposefully ordered the ship to slam into some asteroids to test their endurance, force the ship to fly at flank

speed for prolonged periods of time and fire uninterrupted salvos from the point-defense guns.<p>

Jeromy was ordering the crew to keep close tabs on all systems to make sure that they're capable of working for long timespans. One of the officers on the bridge reported that there was a slight problem with the ammo link to the missile pods and several point-defense guns as well as constant battery drains on the prototype XEV9-Matos Nonlinear Pulse Cannons. The UNSC Sword of Damocles is the first destroyer to be fitted with laser weaponry, so malfunctions are expected.

When the Engineering crew ran down there, they noticed that several batteries were, in fact, drained from the start, so they had to apply a makeshift decision by linking the secondary thermonuclear reactors to the pulse cannons, instead of batteries. This would guarantee near limitless power feed to energy weapons.

The Sword of Damocles was speeding towards Earth now, running past Mars, hoping to get some deuterium fuel fed to its fusion reactor, since the Infinite Dawn's crew forgot to fuel her up. It didn't take long for them to find out a problem.

'UNSC Sword of Damocles to Earth Command. Anyone there?' Commander Storm hailed the fleet orbiting Earth.

'This is the Fifth Fleet. Report in, Sword of Damocles, what do you need?' A male voice, electronically enhanced, chimed in.

'We were hoping you could sell us deuterium fuel, since we left with a near empty tank.' And that's where the problem kicked in.

'We're not selling hydrogen isotopes as fuel. Our own ships are fueled by element zero and helium.' After the highest ranking officer of the fleet finished, Jeromy cursed. The ship's deuterium reserve was below one percent and it wasn't enough to make a slipspace jump. Not by a long shot. It could help keep the ship running for a few days at best and the ship's communications arrays weren't fully calibrated.

'Do you have a long-range communicator that we can use to contact our fleet a few dozen light-years from here?'

'Negative, Sword of Damocles. Ours is down for maintenance. Where are you from anyway?'

'Caprica system, we're part of Battlegroup Phoenix from the United Nations Space Command Navy. We came to Sol for a shakedown run.' Jeromy stood up from his seat and thought of what could they do.

'We'll see what we can do, can't let the civvies see a new ship in orbit.'

'Thank you, Officer.' Storm approached his comms officer to look at his console, seeing that the comms array is colored in red, meaning it's down for maintenance.

Deep Space, Unknown Cerberus Station, 0722 hours by UTC.  
>The SPARTAN-III Headhunters, UNSC Marines and Alliance Marines

worked closely together to secure it, deck by deck, room by room. When they stumbled upon a research lab, they were shocked and sick to their stomachs. Some Marines even dropped their helmets just to puke.<p>

'What kind of sick motherfucker does this?' John B-201 commented and then turned his stare at Chris, who was staring at people being zombified, turned into robotic husks and then fitted with white and yellow combat armor.

It matched all the details of the process of turning living Human beings into husks by the Geth on Eden Prime, and by the Collectors. Living. Human. Beings.

'Admiral Hackett, are you seeing this?' One of the Alliance Marines contacted the Admiral and was moving around a lot, giving the Admiral a better view of the surrounding area from his helmet camera.

'I wonder how many people have been reported missing and how many does Cerberus actually have.' Hackett sounded shocked, disturbed himself. 'Commander, I want you set a nuclear bomb in that lab and destroy the entire station. We can't save anyone here.' This order was directed at Chris C-333, since his ship was the only one with a nuclear arsenal in a range of several thousand light-years. Also, no one seemed surprised that Hackett knew about the nukes onboard the Cataclysm. He was informed of the capabilities of the UNSC Navy.

Chris had to agree, he didn't like the sight and scent of this operation either. He radioed some of his Marines to bring a HAVOK Warhead aboard, but a moment later, they were attacked and quickly surrounded by Cerberus troopers.

'Alliance Marines to Admiral Hackett. We could use a little help here, we're surrounded!' One of the Marines desperately tried to reach Hackett for help, but apparently the comms lines were jammed after Chris made the last call. They were on their own, but thanks to having battle-hardened UNSC Marines around, the battle was going slightly smoother. The flanking maneuvers were countered and more reliable positions were taken by the allied force. However, the battle was still a pretty big bloodshed. The allied platoon was outnumbered five-to-one.

It took them two hours to clear out the ambushers and let the Marines carrying the HAVOK nuke through. Two hours to make sure the bomb could go off safely. There were light skirmishes around the entrances of the lab, however the menacingly dark-looking room was soon re-arranged with the middle housing the Shiva-class missile with a HAVOK 30 megaton warhead.

After ten minutes of priming the bomb, the allied platoon double timed for their transports to haul ass out of the station and far away from the blast radius. When they flew away from the station and returned to their ships, the Alliance vessels made a light-year jump away, while the Cataclysm engaged its sub-light thrusters and flew several thousand kilometers in seconds to reach a safer area. Only seconds later, the nuclear warhead exploded and sent debris as well as armored bodies from the station flying in all directions and breakneck speeds.

Hackett opened a comms channel to Chris.

'Well done, Commander. Though it wasn't an impressive operation, judging by your records, it certainly helped us understand how Cerberus gets its hands on loyal infantry. You must return back to Captain Sandman now, as your mission has ended and I fear there is something worse approaching over the horizon. Thank you for your assistance, Hackett out.'

With that, Hackett's flotilla returned back to Alliance space, just as undetected as it had left it. The Cataclysm, meanwhile, made an immediate slipspace jump back to Caprica where the Battlegroup was already waiting for it. However, when the supercarrier returned, it noticed that about two more warships had entered. Two old Marathon-class heavy cruisers of the Nineteenth Fleet, one of which contained Vice Admiral Vladimir Orlovsky and it was in the process of assuming a comfortable position with the UNSC Infinite Dawn.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Sol System, New Universe, 1033 hours by UTC.<strong>

>Jeromy Storm was pacing around the bridge, hoping for good news from his officers, but three hours of pacing hadn't helped. He thought that a bad luck streak had begun, but a sudden call from the Alliance ships helped him regain confidence that luck is with him.<p>

'Sword of Damocles? London here. We've brought our comms array back online and we've informed your superior that you're stuck. He said that two frigates have been sent to fuel your ship with enough deuterium to bring you back to Caprica.' Jeromy observed the SSV London make a fly-by of his Destroyer.

'Thank you, London. We're so glad to hear news like these.' Jeromy grinned, with the smile literally stretching from ear to ear. This wasn't what he planned to do in a shakedown run, but at least the tests confirmed that the ship is battle ready and the parts used to construct it are in top shape.

The frigates arrived minutes later and with the help of Pelican dropships, they extended temporarily fitted tubes that they attached to the Sword of Damocles. Through these tubes, they poured deuterium in to the ship in large quantities. Finally, thirty minutes later, the Sword of Damocles was able to initiate a slipspace jump back to Caprica and deliver a final report of the shakedown run results.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>A new character, you ask? 'But man, you have enough characters already!' - this is what I assume you'd want to say, and I agree. I have a lot, but many of them are going to have something else too. In fact, this chapter features TWO new characters that will play far more important roles: 1LT Christina Orlovskaya (Belongs to a wonderful girl that is interested in this story) and Sangheili Ultra Veso 'Yermo (Belongs to none other than RadMystical. You earned the right).<strong>

\*\*Anyway, hope you liked it, next one's in the works already, and I promise you all, more from the Mass Effect side is on the way. A lot more.\*\*

### 23. First Meeting: Reapers

There have been late reports of unknown, towering alien warships appearing in the outer edges of this galaxy. UNSC reports sent to Alliance Command on Earth, in the city of Vancouver, show that the Batarian homeworld and their colonies have been completely wiped out. No pirate raids on Alliance bases and trade routes, no pirates harassing Alliance warships, nothing. It was strange, like the most powerful tornado moving across the continent and swiftly wiping out anything and anyone that dares stand in its way, leaving no clues behind.

Alliance Command on Earth feared that Lieutenant Commander John Shepard's warnings may have had a basis after all! Especially now that all contact with the greater galaxy has been lost and the Alliance couldn't dial up the UNSC anymore for eyes and ears out in space.

Commander Shepard himself has been summoned to meet the council and persuade them that the Reaper threat is real.

Meanwhileâ€”on the edge of the Sol System, multiple Alliance fleets were fighting a massive Reaper force trying to ram its way through. Admiral Steven Hackett was desperately trying to hold them off and try to warn Earth of impending doom, as well as trying to warn the UNSC that the Reapers have arrived. When the Reaper fleet smashed the majority of the garrisoned Alliance fleet and made its way to Earth, Hackett ordered a full retreat and only after he left the edges of the Sol system did he manage to get a signal out to the UNSC.

'Admiral Steven Hackett of the Systems Alliance Navy to any and all nearby UNSC combat elements, Sol system has been attacked, our fleets have been forced into retreat and Earth is possibly under siege already. We request your immediate intervention in this matter. This is not the time to be picky, it is a time for allies to stand together, grow together.' The message was filled with static, but the two Hyperion-class stealth frigates that flew by silently near the Arcturus system and immediately relayed the message to Captain Sandman and Battlegroup Phoenix.

**\*\*Aboard the UNSC Infinite Dawn's bridge, 2200 hours by UTC. March 6th, 2555.\*\***

>The bridge of the Infinite Dawn was half-empty. Only the crew that took on itself the duties of night shift was working on the bridge and the crew was there just to maintain if the ship's systems are running smoothly, but their quiet night was disturbed early by a message from the Systems Alliance. Captain Sandman gave them a strict order that if the Alliance hails them with a message that could contain something about Earth being invaded, they should hit the red alert and wake the entire crew. There was another, shorter message.<p>

'The Reapers are here.'

The mention of these Reapers, especially when everyone in Battlegroup Phoenix was aware of the myth, was enough to just hit the alert, and so, the senior officer slammed the alert button and the hallways of

the ship were lit in red color.

'Attention: All hands, there is an invasion within the Local cluster. This is not a drill, I repeat, this is not a drill. Report to your stations ASAP.' The ship's AI's voice could be heard on every deck. Every Marine and crewman or woman that was asleep immediately woke up and put on their gear as they ran for their stations. Even Captain Sandman quickly got dressed in his GEN2/Warrior armor and ran for the bridge, along with his comms officer "Christina Orlovskaya. Upon arrival, the message was played to them and Christina immediately assumed her place at the communications terminal.

'Captain, we have messages coming in from all around the Galaxy. It's a coordinated strike.' Orlovskaya announced after seeing the sheer amount of messages sent all around the galaxy with the mention of Reaper invasion.

'Blitzkrieg on a galactic scale.' John sat down on his chair and observed the hologram atop the holo-table take shape of a galaxy and colored all Reaper-invaded systems in dark red, while free systems were blue. 'Get me Hackett!'

Orlovskaya connected the UNSC Infinite Dawn with Admiral Hackett's ship using a way of combining slipspace communication with quantum entanglement. Hackett responded as soon as he got the call.

'Hackett here.'

'Admiral, what's the situation?'

'Captain Sandman. We've lost several dozen cruisers in the opening sequence of the battle and a few dozen more when we retreated. Our fleet has been reduced considerably and we've lost control of the Sol system. Our entire Navy has been engaged all across our space and we're stretched too thin to respond effectively. Currently, the Exodus cluster is a prime target for a Reaper invasion as there are absolutely no Alliance forces there. In fact, we've lost contact with the Eden Prime and Terra Nova colonies. Can we count on your assistance?' Hackett's report didn't wait around when he confirmed that John Sandman was on the other end of the call.

'I'll scramble two flotillas to recon the colonies and I'll keep you in touch one second, Admiral.' Captain Sandman heard someone mention something about Reapers while staring at the radar.

'What's going on?' John yelled across the bridge, looking at the radar and seeing red blips pop all over at long range.

'Based on data sent by Alliance ships, those are Reaper IFF's. Over one hundred have been identified and they're approaching Caprica fast!' One of the officers, dressed in a typical Navy BDU, announced as the Captain stared at him, waiting for more details.

'ETA?'

'About one hour, Sir!'

The Captain turned his gaze towards Commander Storm who was right behind him. He had heard him enter the bridge a few seconds ago.

'Storm, order any freight ships to drop their cargo and drag civilians onboard. I want every non-essential civilian on Caprica evacuated right now!' John then turned to face Christina's look. 'Contact Hood, tell him that we need Phoenix-class ships and a fresh fleet.' Christina merely nodded and turned to her terminal, as she sent a voice message to Admiral Hood through the interdimensional slipspace gateway that was being kept open by multiple generators.

After twenty minutes, two fleets, one military and one civilian, rushed through the gateway. The civilian fleet immediately scrambled to head to the surface and load as many people as it could while the military fleet " the Nineteenth Fleet " regrouped with Captain Sandman's Battlegroup Phoenix and assumed defensive positions around the Orbital Defense Grid. Admiral Orlovsky had himself transferred over to the Infinite Dawn for this operation, but he gave the commanding rights to Captain Sandman, seeing as he has more experience against unknown threats.

After the hour had passed, and a huge chunk of the population evacuated from Caprica, the Reapers had finally entered firing range. They didn't hold back and revealed their arsenal " spinal mounted molten metal weapons that fired at a fraction of the speed of light. It was a punishing close range weapon, but the UNSC had the perfect counter-measure " emergency thrusters. However, neither fleet was closer than 50,000 kilometers to one another. The UNSC, though, was able to land precise and perfect hits on the Reapers by now. Captain Sandman ordered them to fire.

The upgraded MAC coils on all ships allowed the shells to reach far faster speeds that could allow them to cross 50,000 kilometers in a far shorter time span. This meant that battles could take place at longer ranges, where evasive actions could be easily calculated and dodges could be executed without delay.

The pure destructive power from a single MAC was enough to gut a Reaper Sovereign-class ship in two shots " one to lower the shield and one to annihilate the hull plating as well as the interior and everything inside. Heavier ships, like cruisers, could utterly annihilate a Reaper in just one shot. The Infinite Dawn could annihilate multiple Reapers with just a single burst of its six destructive cannons - four super-heavy MAC guns and two energy projectors. The Reapers kept going closer and closer to Caprica, however, their ranks were growing smaller and smaller until the last Reaper, a tiny Destroyer, was destroyed by a missile salvo from the UNSC Sword of Damocles which flew past only a kilometer from it at breakneck speeds.

The victory at Caprica came at a cost " Battlegroup Phoenix was unable to respond to the invasion of the Sol system and control over the system's space traffic was lost entirely and the Reapers held it in their hands, paws, tentacles or whatever anyone would use. However, this battle proved that the UNSC is an effective counter force to the Reapers with its superior armament, especially when the UNSC has got orbital defense platforms around their planet. Though their numbers were too low to be efficiently deployed on every planet

that's under siege and the Reapers had unknown numbers, possibly in the tens of thousands.

By the end of the battle, Caprica's population plummeted down to only a vital military number â€" 10 million. 8 million of which were combat-ready Marines and Army units and among the 2 million others were the wounded (5% total) and logistical support units along with naval crewmembers.

Admiral Hackett, realizing the relative safety of the Caprica system, ordered the entire Alliance Navy to regroup there. Every fleet made a jump to Caprica where they massed around the planet's orbital defense grid and began repairs to the damaged hulls. Meanwhile, Admiral Hackett made his way aboard the UNSC Infinite Dawn's bridge, where he met Captain Sandman and Admiral Orlovsky. These three are responsible for further actions in countering the Reapers across the Galaxy.

'Admiral Hackett, report.' Orlovsky demanded a report with his strong Russian accent whenever he spoke English.

'In a direct engagement with the Reapers, we lost a huge chunk of our effective combat force and as a result, we lost control of the entire Solar system. Before we left, I managed to get a message through to Commander Shepard to retrieve an artifact from Mars. He completed the mission, sent me a copy of the schematics and went to the Citadel to get the Council on board with us. I've yet to know how that went down.' Hackett reported to Admiral Orlovsky and since they were nearly of equal rank, he didn't use the word 'Sir'.

'What's the situation around the Galaxy?' John asked and let Hackett assume his place so that he can manipulate the holographic map into the shape of the galaxy and color all systems in their respective colors. Blue representing the Alliance, lighter blue potential allies, green â€" UNSC. Red stood for Reapers and they had gained quite a bit of space in a short time span.

'As far as we know, Palaven is under siege. The Asari are fortifying their own systems and the command center for the Alliance is wiped out. The Batarians are no more and the Terminus is under the heaviest sieges so far.'

'And the Quarians?' Commander Chris marched in, alone, in his power armor, demanding an answer, since Tali had left his ship a while ago to head back to the Migrant Fleet.

'Settle down, Commander.' John adamantly ordered and returned back to discussing matters with the two Admirals.

'Not much is known about the Quarians so far. What we know is that they plan on something. Something big.' Hackett seemed convinced that the Quarians want to stage an assault somewhere, but the main question in his mind was 'Where?'. For Captain Sandman and Chris, the answer seemed beyond obvious â€" they want to reclaim their homeworld in this mess.

'What's our next step, Admirals?' John looked at the two, determined to take action and blow up fleets.

'Repair, restock and protect what we can.' Admiral Hackett was the



first to answer, but Admiral Orlovsky's answer followed soon after.

'My fleet will help Hackett, but you, Captain, do what you think is necessary. The people here don't deserve to get exterminated. No one deserves that fate.'

Christina sneaked up to the four high ranking officers and offered her input on the situation. She assumed her position next to the Captain and observed everyone at first.

'Perhaps we should start by helping out the Turians on Palaven? If I read right, they are this universe's most powerful military force with the largest navy.'

Admiral Hackett and Admiral Orlovsky were inclined to agree. If they can secure the Turian home, they can get a larger force to command and control.

Hackett decided that it would be best to allow Captain Sandman, once again, to roam the galaxy at his will and help Commander Shepard gather the largest united force in history.

Hackett and Orlovsky, along with Sandman's and Commander Chris's opinions, were discussing so many military matters that the two younger officers were starting to feel exhaustion. Even the Admirals themselves had a harder time in developing proper plans, because the Reapers are foes who do not require logistics and who have endless waves of surface units.

While the two Admirals were talking with each other, Sandman picked up his datapad and began reading Christina Orlovskaya's UNSC profile.

\* \* \*

><p>NAME: Christina Orlovskaya<br>AGE: 20  
>DATE OF BIRTH: 2534, 18th March.<br>AFFILIATION: UNSC Navy,  
Battlegroup Phoenix.  
>RANK: First Lieutenant (1LT)<p>

HISTORY: Born in Moscow, on planet Earth, Christina Orlovskaya lived a peaceful life in the towering skyscrapers of Moscow's megapolis. She began attending a Russian High School when, on October 2552, Earth was invaded. The UNSC Russian Army Command Garrison began evacuating the entire city, and sending them to shelters, but Christina tried to run her own way. She embarked on a D77-TC 'Pelican' dropship and was en-route to what she thought was the safer European part of the continent, until her gunship was downed. She thought she was dead for sure, as aliens were approaching her from all sides, when she saw more dropships fly overhead and deploy troops that encircled her position and protected her. That's where she met Captain John Sandman, who, back then, was a high ranking officer of the Marine Corps. Two years later, on the summer of 2554, she enlisted within the Navy as a communications specialist and, upon graduation where she had excellent grades, was immediately assigned to the UNSC Infinite Dawn, which was Captain John Sandman's ship.

Christina Orlovskaya's grandfather, Vladimir Orlovsky, serves in the

UNSC Navy as the Admiral of the Nineteenth Fleet.

\* \* \*

><p>When the Captain finished reading, he tried to access her grades and previous affiliations with any other faction, however, he stumbled upon an ''ACCESS DENIED'' screen along with entire fragments of text covered in black ink. There was only one office in the entire UNSC that loves to waste black ink on files â€” the Office of Naval Intelligence. He now had suspicions that Christina might be working for ONI, but he needed solid proof.<p>

''Admirals, may I leave for a moment?'' John lowered his datapad and stared both Admirals into their eyes. Hackett nodded with Orlovsky seemingly agreeing. John stepped away and then outside of the bridge as he walked towards his quarters. Subtly, he contacted Jessica through his earpiece.

''Jess, scan this file on my datapad will you?''

''Will do.'' Jessica responded instantly, but then began to question the Captain. ''Your mental function is increased. Are you worried or in deep thought?''

''Both. Worried that we may have an infiltrator on the ship, and thinking about their plan. Surely they don't want to sabotage this ship so that it fails in battle, do they?'' The Captain walked in his room and from a holotank next to his work desk emerged Jessica. He took a data chip with Orlovskaya's file on it and uploaded it into Jessica's network. Jessica's hologram nodded and she generated a file in front of her as she began analyzing. John sat down on a chair and waited for her to finish.

''This will take a while, John.''

John took the Boltshot pistol that he stored a souvenir from the day when the UNSC Fire of Humanity was still alive and kicking, from his last birthday aboard that ship when Chris C-333 awarded it to him. He observed it from every angle, began wiping some dust away and then prepped it to fire, to see how it looks like when activated. His moment of fun, however, didn't last long. Jessica had finished her analysis of the file on Christina Orlovskaya and some truly intriguing information was found.

''According to this file, right after signing up in the Navy, she was hired by ONI. You're going to love this part. It's due to her connection to you, while, even miniscule at the time, was good enough for them.'' This revelation forced John to put his Boltshot away, back where it was on the desk.

''So, basically, they want a mole that I wouldn't suspect to be affiliated with them?''

''Exactly. Her file says she's extremely qualified with communications technology and works well under stress. She also has a degree in slipspace technology and martial arts.'' The last two attributes raised a series of warnings inside of John's consciousness.

''Where is she right now?''

'Heading to the Engineering Deck, of course. To sabotage our ship. Did you know that all it takes to kill us is misplacing the slipspace drive while it's offline for the time being?' John ignored Jessica's dark humor and ran off, running past everyone and into the lift to take him down to Engineering, to the Engine Room where she's most likely headed to. Christina knows that the Infinite Dawn is planning for a counter-offensive against the Reapers and this is the perfect time to strike, but it's a sloppy attack. She hasn't earned the trust of the crew yet to make the most powerful strike.

John was rushing through the ship's long decks like the lightning, so as to risk tearing his muscles when running far faster than a typical SPARTAN-IV, but time was of the essence. Sabotaging the core is nothing difficult, so it has to be handled with the greatest amount of care possible.

He arrived at the Engine Room a few minutes later, with a few Marines right behind him, as he began to scan the room for any unwanted Human females there, when he found her, just a floor below and next to the engine itself, doing something with a console there. He had no time to run down the stairs so he jumped and landed right behind her. Slowly and silently, he approached her and restrained her almost instantly, preventing her from moving and overpowering with no effort. She wasn't even sure if that was one of those Spartans aboard, or a veteran Elite.

'What were you doing with my engine?' John yelled in her ear as he demanded to know of the true purpose of her being here.

'I was seeing what was the cause of a sudden problem in communications that I traced back here. Look in the console and you'll see!' She said, out of great pain when being restrained. John hesitantly looked up, only to find out that she's telling the truth. 'I've got my eye on you. One wrong move and it's time to space you, infiltrator.' John released her and turned around to walk away and signaled his Marines to stand down and return back to their place.

'Cracked a skull, Cap?' One of the Marines, a Private First Class who goes by the name of Chips Dubbo and is a war veteran, said with humor. 'Made a postcard out of a traitor?'

'No, Private. Not today.'

While the group walked away, Christina was left alone, coughing that she had no air in her lungs, her eyes filled with tears from the pain a Spartan can inflict on her, especially the one that she had really trusted and had deep feelings for. She didn't know why he did that, why did he have a sudden burst of aggression towards her, until Jessica's hologram emerged from a nearby holotank.

'How does it feel to be leaped on by the most powerful fourth generation Spartan, you little traitorous bitch?' Jessica sounded convinced that Christina was a traitor, but the latter was shocked to hear her mention betrayal. She tried to wipe her tears away and breathe in some air, while Jessica continued talking. 'You're on John Sandman's ship. You breathe the air that literally belongs to him, so you'd better watch your step while he's still not pissed off with your Intelligence superiors.'

She finally stood up and gathered her strength. ''Jessica, listen, whatever file you cracked open, it's a lie. The black ink part is a lie invented by them to keep talented candidates under suspicion and eventuallyâ€¦ I don't know what. Something horrible.'' Jessica analyzed her words and expressions, finding no signs of lies. However, she did try to analyze the possibility of Christina's words bearing some truth and she came up with an eighty seven percent possibility of truth, since ONI would want top candidates for themselves. ''Will you believe me? You're an AI, you can see through lies and deception. I am one of those people that are without friends and allies to protect me when I need that.''

Jessica pondered for a moment, being quite silent. ''I'll try to dig up more information and keep the Captain's suspicions away from you, however, until I find clean evidence that you're not with ONI, I can't persuade the Captain, but I have your back.'' She was lying, though with a tone and facial expression that made Christina think that Jessica was sincere. In reality, Jessica would try to dig up dirt against Christina, because when an accusation of being an ONI saboteur pops up, it has to be examined to the letter.

**\*\*Captain's Quarters, 1755 hours by UTC.\*\***

>After a while, Jessica appeared over the Captain's room's holotank and noticed he was actually waiting for her. He stared right at her, waiting for information.<p>

''So, she claimed that the black ink info is a lie. I analyzed her, and I didn't find signs of lies, but there are people able to perfectly hide their emotions. I also ran the analysis on the possibility of ONI planting fake information in personnel records and I turned out with a nearly ninety percent positive.'' John sighed.

''So, basically, there's a high chance that she's innocent?''

''Quite so, Captain, but I am still digging up something to see if it's actually true. Thus far, I am trying to crack ONI's database to see if she's an agent. I don't think she'd lie like that especially that everyone knows capabilities of AI's.''

''I'm betting my Boltshot on it that ONI's trying to assemble a private army of some sorts to be able to instigate wars and destroy forces trying to stop destruction. Regardless, assign Spartans to guard her.'' John stood up and corrected his uniform a bit. John has really disliked intelligence offices with near limitless power within the UNSC. ONI is a good example of one going rogue with the UNSC and UEG being in the dark about it.

John walked towards the door, but then Jessica told him that his MARK VII had arrived and is being sent to his private quarters. John merely smirked, as this was the perfect assault armor that Doctor Halsey was developing, at least as a blueprint. He still had a few things to discuss with the Admirals, but later today he would finally take the new power armor out for a spin in the War Games against other Spartans and Elites led by Rala.

**\*\*Three hours later, War Games Simulation Deck.\*\***

>There was an ongoing training session for 1st platoon of Bearslayer

Company of SPARTAN-IVs, however the Captain's arrival interfered with their session. On one hand, they were happy to see their own Captain in action, while on the other, they really wanted to get some sparring with themselves. The Captain stepped in the room with his new MJOLNIR MARK VII. It appeared to be as light as a GEN2 suit, but it seemed to have more efficient Titanium and Carbon nanotube armor, along with a hybrid fusion-plasma power generator, nano-bots to fix the suit and heal the operator as well as something that neither Covenant nor the UNSC has ever seen or encountered â€" the ability to shape energy shields. Limited, of course. There were other abilities, but John didn't bother examining them all on the manual. He wanted to see what this thing is really good for and the best way to test it is a battle against Rala.<p>

He stretched out a bit, to feel his new armor and how well it responds to his movements. The MARK VII delivered to him looked a lot like the MARK IV used by the Spartans aboard the UNSC Spirit of Fire back in 2531, with the same shoulder plate size, the right being bigger. The two visual exceptions were that this one was black and it had a specifically designed HAYABUSA helmet for it, meant to fit with all GEN2 projects - thicker, lighter and more protective, as well as intimidating. It also serves a stealthier purpose, because the visor isn't as revealed as most other Spartan classes. He had an original helmet that he stored in his quarters, but he preferred the HAYABUSA/Mark VII variant.

'Are you ready to be put to shame?' Rala taunted her boyfriend, knowing that he'll respond with either humor or sarcasm.

'I sure am ready to deliver you some shame.' He smiled under his armor and his combat systems activated. The shield charged up nearly instantly thanks to the new power system and the first test was to see how well it would handle a Plasma Pistol overload and then a full mag of an MA5D as well as a Covenant Carbine. Rala picked up the pistol and overloaded it, aiming at John. She fired, letting the bolt of plasma take care of his shields and she only saw his shields blink for about three seconds until they recharged back up. Then, she picked up her personal weapon of choice â€" the Carbine. She emptied the entire magazine into it and saw that the shield was still holding up and compared to other armor generations, this was the strongest. The MA5D had almost no effect on it. A Marine landed a direct hit with an SRS99-S5 AM against John's head, but even then the shield stopped it and the bullet just bounced upwards and safely landed by his feet.

'Armor defenses check out, John.' Rala commented after seeing his armor's increased durability.

'It's not the armor that matters when in combat. It's the operator's skill.' John went into his philosophical mode and then tried to shape the shield into a pair of wings â€" phoenix wings. He was successful and they emerged from his sides. Everyone who was watching the test was amazed. Shield manipulation is a difficult thing to do, damn near impossible for new users of MARK VII, but John was adaptive. When he couldn't do it one way, he tried the other and it was all a matter of using his mind and imagination.

'A SPARTAN-IV wearing GEN1 armor.' John smirked and made the shield figure disappear, returning back around his armor. He looked over his hands, admiring the look of the armor. Suddenly, he noticed Rala

lunging at him, delivering a punch to his chest and pushing him back a bit. A good Sangheili punch can still harm the Spartan. John regained himself and prepared for a friendly spar with Rala. She attacked him again, with a fooling maneuver, aiming at his head but hitting his gut instead.

John retaliated, after Rala delivered her punch he jumped back and then tackled her down to the ground where he tried to punch her head, but stopped his fist only ten centimeters from her helmet, forcing Rala to admit defeat.

'Not fair.' She said, noting that John is too good inside powered assault armor.

'If you want, we can spar without armor on some other time. It'll be fair that way.' He smirked under his helmet, but then Rala kicked him off using her legs and showed a smile of her own.

'If you think a Spartan inside super armor can beat me, you've got another thing coming Sandman.'

John and Rala both got back up to their feet and were about to hug, only crewman disturbed them with news from Admirals Hackett and Orlovsky.

'Captain, the Admirals need you at the bridge. They want you to lead a delegation to reach the Quarians, since we've been able to track them down. They're going to hit the geth-controlled Rannoch pretty soon and they're massing just outside the Far Rim cluster.'

After this, the Captain and Rala both ran to the tram that would take them to the bridge. Upon arrival, Hackett briefed them of their new task which was pretty much a more detailed version of the crewman's report. The crew of the Infinite Dawn would have to represent not only the UNSC, but the Systems Alliance as well. About two more hours passed with the officers discussing the little details of the mission until the Admirals finally had to leave the ship, knowing that the Captain would waste no time in trying to persuade the Quarians to establish communications with the Allied force.

Thirty minutes after the Admirals left, the Infinite Dawn engaged its slipspace drive and made a slip towards the approximately pinpointed location of the Quarian Migrant Fleet with all of its fifty thousand ships.

After slipping out, however, a problem was encountered. The Migrant Fleet maneuvered its heavy cruisers to meet the Infinite Dawn, aiming with their guns at it, training every turret on it. The Quarians were actually prepared for war, and the Infinite Dawn would be their first practice target unless the Captain would be able to do something!

\* \* \*

><p><strong>So, I have been pretty busy these last few weeks with studying and all that, so I apologize if the quality of this specific chapter is lower (if it is anyway). So, I would like to announce that I'm now active on DeviantART (Stealer-L1F3) and I have compiled profiles of my OC's for everyone to be able to see. Also, thank you all for reading Reclaimers. It means quite a lot for me to know that a lot of people have interest in this fanfic.<strong>

## 24. Quarian Counter-Offensive

**\*\*Hello there, my mateys! I'm baaaack along with Toruscan, Chaosdixie or whatever he goes by nowadays with an epic and action-filled chapter of Reclaimers! We're nearing the end of this story and I'm kind of satisfied with what I've written thus far, though I felt it could've been better if I hadn't lost interest in writing for Mass Effect, but regardless, enjoy!\*\***

\* \* \*

><p><strong>March 8th, 2555 (2186 by Systems Alliance Calendar), Far Rim Cluster, 0543 hours by UTC.<br>**\*\*The UNSC Infinite Dawn was at a stand-off with about a hundred Quarian heavy cruisers with their guns pointed at it. It wasn't a very pleasant sight, but the Captain had to pull diplomatic cards on the table just to get the Quarians to relax. After a bit, John tried to make contact with what seemed to be the leading ship of the flotilla sent against him â€" a large liveship called the \_Rayya.\_ There was no response for quite a while and Jessica reported that they were preparing to fire, since she could detect infrared energy build-up at the barrels of their guns, though she also added that these weapons are insufficient to threaten the integrity of the ship's shielding. Some of these heavy ships also had mass accelerators, albeit weaker than the war-time UNSC frigate MAC's, but they still presented a threat when in massive numbers.**

'Let's see if they understand Morse code.' John turned his restless gaze at the holotank above which Jessica had popped up. 'Use the frontal spotlights and give them a signal that we're friendly.'

In response, Jessica merely nodded and soon disappeared. The lights illuminating the sides and other outer areas of the ship soon disappeared and the frontal spotlights turned on, shining brightly. In a few minutes, the lights began to turn on and off, seemingly randomly. Not everyone knew of Morse code besides Humans, but apparently, someone on the Quarian flotilla recognized it. Or they recognized the shape of the ship or the letters on its side that clearly read 'Infinite Dawn' and it was in clear English â€" the main Human language.

'Eh... did the plan work?' John asked one question but thought that it was merely a prelude to being fired upon by a hundred mass accelerators. Not showing fear, he walked up to the very front of the bridge, to get a better view and idea of how many ships are actually in front of the Infinite Dawn. At least two hundred had their guns lined up, but one of these cruisers broke fromation and flew closer to the ship.

'Captain, that ship has powered down its weapons â€" a sign of non-aggression for us.' Jessica reappeared over the holo-tank and used her Human form to look at the fleet in front and then at the cruiser that just passed by the bridge, apparently heading for the hangar. 'I've received a message in English that's requesting permission to dock. I've taken the liberty of giving them clearance, if you don't mind. You might want to use a translator software used by the Alliance, they said that that's the main way the species communicate with one another here anyway.'

John shrugged and took the little chip that contained the software and inserted it into his datapad which he always keeps with him.

'Lieutenant, you're in charge of the bridge while I'm in the hangar. Don't show any sign of aggression.' John ordered his helmsman to take the seat, who immediately saluted, acknowledging his temporary promotion, and left his seat as he nervously took the Captain's seat.

Meanwhile, Captain Sandman was pacing, along with an escort of two Spartans in MJOLNIR/GEN2 Warrior suits, towards the main hangar bay " walking throuh hallways, traveling via the tram system and then walking again until they reached the shuttle in which the Quarians had landed aboard. Eight stepped outside of the shuttle, which was clearly bought from the Systems Alliance since it was an unarmed version of the UT-47 Kodiak. John recognized one of them, Tali'Zorah, and he immediately understood how and why the ships didn't fire at a 'trespasser' that they may consider the Infinite Dawn. Tali was talking to what appeared to be a figure of high authority within the Quarian Flotilla.

'Auntie Raan, this is the Infinite Dawn, the flagship of Battlegroup Phoenix. It looks amazing, doesn't it?'

'It looks like something not even the Systems Alliance can build. I guess you weren't delusional when you said they were of another universe. Even the symbol and the color preference is different.'

John walked up to the Quarians, noticing that the six others are meant to be Marines or body guards. Or however the Quarians call them. To get the attention of these two figures, he cleared his throat and awaited a response. Standing proudly in his Captain's uniform would make Marines aboard his ship snap to attention, especially when he clears his throat. They don't want to hear that since usually it means that they may get in trouble.

'Captain Sandman.' Admiral Shala'Raan vas Tonbay, the older Quarian that was just a bit shorter than Tali, spoke. To the Captain's surprise, she could speak in English quite clearly with an accent that reminded of Eastern Europeans. 'It's a pleasure to meet you at long last.'

Raan offered her hand for a shake, a Human custom. Without hesitation, John gently accepted it, trying to be sure that he doesn't crush her hand. After the shake, they pulled their hands away and it was time for Raan to begin questioning the purpose of why the Captain has arrived, on his ship, to the location of the Quarian Migrant Fleet.

'Why is your ship doing so far away from your base?'

'Admiral Hackett asked a favor of us. Our ship is officially a representative of the UNSC and the Systems Alliance and we're here to establish the foundation for diplomatic relations and pull the Migrant Fleet into a joint fleet that would eventually retake Earth.' John put it simply, to avoid giving any strange points about this alliance and its pros and cons.



'So, Humans lost their home?' Raan sounded a bit shocked to hear this. After all, the Quarrians wouldn't want anyone to lose their homes like they did â€" it's the worst possible fate a species can have. Raan's inner self didn't like the idea of instantly accepting a proposal without a consent from the Quarrian Admiralty, so she had to contact Han'Gerrel, Daro'Xen and Zaal'Koris to join in on making a decision. She carefully informed them about the situation, about Humanity and its recent loss and they kept talking until three shuttles landed on the Infinite Dawn with the three Admirals stepping out and gathering around Raan and Tali.

Most of the Admirals seemed to be amused at one of the top military forces losing their home. Han'Gerrel was laughing, and it was evil even for someone like him.

'The Alliance losing Earth? Ha! What fools must they have been.' Han'Gerrel kept amusing himself about Human inability until the moment he heard loud footsteps behind him and turned around to notice Captain Sandman looking straight down at the tiny Quarrian. That instantly made him shiver from fear.

'My, my, this one is far larger than the average Human.' Daro'Xen was instantly interested in the Captain. Not romantically, of course, but rather scientifically. She knew a lot about the Humans from her own Pilgrimage â€" a tradition where a Quarrian tries to find something valuable outside of the Flotilla to bring back to their chosen ship Captain. From the looks of it, Daro thought that his armor weighed a ton or somewhere around there.

'Stop staring at me, you won't be able to dissect me either way.' John barked at Daro, his voice making her feel intimidated as her eyes met the Thousand Yard Stare of this officer for the first time. She took one step backwards, but got her composure back instantly, showing off her real personality â€" impossible to intimidate. She crossed her arms and let out a 'Hmph.' sound at the same time, and tilted her head slightly away.

The Systems Alliance fleet was crushed by the invading Reapers and they had to pull out from the Sol system. Earth is not entirely lost, billions are still there, but with every day, thousands upon thousands are killed and repurposed.' John resumed briefing the Admirals about the importance of the situation, but Han'Gerrel rejoined the chatter, despite his fear of the massive Human in front.

'We're pretty close to reclaiming our own homeworld. We cannot just abandon our people's hopes and... and our dreams! Besides, if you want to help us, you need to secure us a planet suitable for Quarrian life so that we can leave our civilians there.'

John nodded in acknowledgement, realizing that he just signed up for an attack on the geth and that he might as well declare a state of war between the UNSC's Battlegroup Phoenix and the Geth.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Several hours later.<br>\*<strong>Sitting in his 'throne' in the bridge, Captain Sandman was awaiting a signal from the Quarrian Admiralty Board for the beginning of the official invasion into the

Tikkun system. Admiral Gerrel had asked his ship to delay their attack until the situation has escalated and the geth bring out their heavy hitters â€" the dreadnoughts and the Captain was taking his time in planning the attack. He had developed several tactics to take out multiple dreadnoughts at the same time without endangering the Quarian Flotilla that would the geth ships be mixed in with due to typical tactics of massive fleet engagements ruling in this universe. Minutes later, the Captain saw Quarian warships jumping out and heading for the Tikkun system. His ship made a slipspace jump too, but he didn't slip straight to the action, rather, he slipped out at the very outskirts of the star system where his crew could monitor the battle and wait for the signal from the Quarian Admirals.

The holographic table pictured two fleets standing off against one another. Every detail was taken into account, including shells fired. This level of detail was attained by Jessica after she hacked into Quarian ship systems and simultaneously maintained contact with each and every one of them. 'The geth have a numerical superiority, Captain.' Jessica gave her report after a thorough analysis and after counting the amount of ships each side fielded.

'We can't jump in yet. We have to wait.'

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Flashback, March 5th.<br>\*<strong>The Infinite Dawn and the Cataclysm were docked together for an unusual and rare ceremony. It was apparently the induction into the SPARTAN-IV Program. The ones who were the main part of the event were Commander Chris C-333 and John B-201 as they were meant to be included into the Spartan Program's, as it's publicly known, Hunter section due to their experience as SPARTAN-III Headhunters. It wasn't a ceremony per se, but it was definitely something like one with a few SPARTAN-IV's witnessing the event and Admiral Hood being on the line to grant his own blessing.

'You two are about to enroll in the official Spartan branch of the United Nations Space Command. You will no longer be considered SPARTAN-III's, you will no longer be considered Headhunters. You will be Spartans, and you will be simply Hunters. You will not lose your current command or rank, nor will you lose your prestige. You will be considered as mentors to the younger, less experienced Spartans at your command and you will train them so that they are qualified as true supersoldiers. You will be called upon to assassinate the most dangerous individuals that the UNSC wants to take out, and you will do it with only the best intentions for Humanity and its allies.'

Captain Sandman gave his speech before he could officially re-classify Chris and John as SPARTAN-IV Hunters.

'Do you both agree to move on from the now-defunct SPARTAN-III Program and enlist in the ranks of the SPARTAN-IV program as elite advisors and Hunters?'

'Yes, sir!'' Both of them saluted in unison. They were ready for a transition to the larger, more expensive program filled with hundreds of supersoldiers and be their mentors.

The Captain raised his datapad and officially erased them from their

previous program and signed them up in the Spartan branch as Hunters. Admiral Hood, who was on the line, quickly received two pending requests that needed his approval for transfer. Hood approved their transfer and also authorized Captain Sandman to let the two new Spartan Hunters to customize their armor by incorporating the more modular, lighter and versatile GEN2 chassis over their GEN1. He picked up two datapads from the nearby table and handed each of the new Spartans these datapads. They contained a program in which they could choose and customize their GEN2 armor. Chris's pick was almost instant.

He chose to mix his armor pretty wildly. He outfitted his new GEN2 armor with Commando shoulders, a Rogue chest piece, Enforcer helmet with a Blindside visor, Mark VI GEN2 greaves, thigh guards and gauntlets. His colors were a mix between ice blue and gold.

John took a while longer to choose his parts. Eventually, he decided on a Recruit helmet with a Solar visor, Recon chest piece, Scout shoulders, Warrior gauntlets, greaves and thigh guards and he picked his colors as being a mix between steel and green.

Both of them were allowed to keep their datapads with them, but they weren't allowed to leave just yet.

'Attention, Spartan Hunters, as of now your last names will be known to the public. Commander Chris, you will officially be called Spartan Siterius, or Commander Siterius. Commander John, you will be known as Spartan Terek or Commander Terek.' Sandman raised his datapad.

'Your names were once covered with black ink, but not anymore. Your profiles still contain some black ink here and there, but your names will be known to the public from now on and forever.'

'Sir, yes sir!' The two Spartans saluted once more.

'Spartans Siterius and Terek, you're both free to return back to your ship and customize your armors as well as get to test run them in War Games. You'll also be given a fresh company of SPARTAN-IV's straight out of their one year training course. It's called the Dragon Company. Train and mentor them well, Commanders. Dismissed.'

\* \* \*

><p><strong>March 8th, UNSC Cataclysm's S-Deck.<br>\*\*\*'Your armor suits you, John.' Chris commented without actually looking at Terek's new power armor enhanced with his old armor's Mark X systems. Chris had precisely the same Mark X enhancements.

'I know it does. I still more way more stylish than you do, mate.' John was doing a few quick push-ups to see how his armor performs. 'Not bad. GEN2 is really comfortable stuff.'

Chris sat on top of John to make his push-ups a bit harder with additional 500 kilograms of Titanium, ceramics, bone and muscle. 'I swear, sometimes my previous armor was crushing a few parts of mine. I don't think it was developed with comfort in mind.'

'Alright, get off me hard-ass. We've got Spartans to train before we can be deployed to action.'

Chris jumped off of John. He looked at the SPARTAN-IV's gathered around him, a total of one hundred young, inexperienced recruits that the Captain wants to be trained before the final confrontation with the Reapers.

'Alright, ladies!'' John announced to get their attention towards him instead of Chris. ''We'll see what you're all physically capable of without your armor. We'll enter the War Games simulation and you'll be forced to run until you collapse or you will be left without food for a long time. No rest for any of you until you earn the right to wear that armor!''

'Get your asses over to the Holo Deck right now! Move it, move it, move it!''

In just a moment's notice, the recruits of Dragon Company were running in an orderly fashion for the Holo Deck. The S-Deck and Holo Deck of the Cataclysm were like copies of the ones found on the Infinity-class ships, and they're both placed on the top level of the ship. Literally divided by only two doors.

When the Dragon Company Spartans arrived and stood in a box formation, their Hunter mentors launched an immediate holographic scenario of a hard-to-pass, mountaneous terrain that the Spartans had to run across. There were small flags that dotted the surface, meaning that they were checkpoints through which the Spartans had to pass and follow them so that they know where they must run.

'We've passed this scenario with flying colors. All three hundred Spartans of Wolf, Jaeger and Bearslayer companies passed it without breaking a single sweat. Captain Sandman said that it was like an effortless walk in the park. Let's see how you recruits handle this test. Get ready to run! Last two platoons to finish will have to run again until you finish!'' Chris shouted and took an M6H Magnum that was attached to his thigh and raised it in the air.

'Your goal - run twenty laps in under one hour.' John announced their goal and, without waiting for any questions, Chris fired a round into the air and the Spartans immediately began running across this terrain. Chris and John followed them, making sure that no one stops running.

'If you stop running then I will personally tear your legs off and feed them to Lekgolo worms!'' Chris screamed so that every Spartan could hear him.

After roughly twenty minutes, a few of the Spartans seemed like they wanted to stop. The terrain was harsh, but Spartans had to endure it. John ran close to them.

'What's the problem, ladies?''

'Sir, this terrainâ€¦ why do we have to run through it?''

'Because Spartans are hard core soldiers that ignore terrain and chew through entire armies of enemies!''

'But sir, with all due respect, you only say that because you're wearing power armor. Give us armor and we'll show you how hard core we are!''

John looked at the terrain in front of them and then back at the two Spartans.

'My armor's not even powered up yet. I'm running around with a bit more than 300 kilograms of metal, so it's harder for me. If you ladies keep complaining then I'll drop you straight in the middle of the Te where you'll learn how to fight. Or get eaten trying.' John proceeded to run past them and approach the next group.

Both Spartan Commanders were monitoring the progress of the recruits in their more rigorous training and this wasn't even the hardest one. There were tons of phases of this day's training that the Dragon Company had to pass to be officially introduced into active service under Battlegroup Phoenix.

They signed up for service under one of UNSC's elite battlegroups voluntarily. Now they have to prove they're up for it.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Tikkun system, two hours later, March 8, 1130 hours by UTC.<br>\*\*\*'Captain Sandman, we need your assistance immediately!'  
Admiral Han'Gerrel's voice echoed through out the bridge of the Infinite Dawn and the Captain immediately gave the order for a short in-system slipspace jump to reach Quarian lines faster. The Infinite Dawn arrived a few seconds after the start of the slip and almost immediately received a hit from one of the geth dreadnoughts that would've annihilated a Quarian frigate right behind it.

The Infinite Dawn's eight hundred 70mm point-defense guns came to life in a display of a rate of fire. Jessica was marking projectiles close enough for rapid interception along with fighter and bomber craft that would otherwise make life hard for the Quarian fleet.

'We've established a landing zone, Captain. Shall we deploy the escort?' Jessica looked straight at the Captain, waiting for his order.

'Affirmative. Deploy all ships.'

In a moment's notice, the Infinite Dawn's non-standard escort of eight Strident-class frigates and two Halberd-class destroyers, which were previously known as the Midlothian-class destroyers, was the deployed and their guns came to life, establishing their own breathing room so that they can safely deploy missiles and fighter craft to secure even more room, thus allowing the Quarian fleet to catch their breaths and repair some of their ships.

Hundreds of F-41 Broadsword A/X fighters were deployed. Their combat capabilities were still untested in battle against the geth, but the initial volleys and short dogfights proved their capability against a larger in numbers foe.

'Captain, the largest geth ships are targeting us and trying to breach through our point defense network with sustained fire.' One of the bridge officers reported after he saw a shell exploding roughly two hundred meters in front of the ship's shielding.

'We'll hold. The Covenant have better weaponry and so do the Reapers. If anything, we've got nukes as a spare plan. Now, gunnery, target of priority - geth dreadnought designated as GDS-02. Fire when ready!' The Captain looked at the holographic display on the holotable and, sometimes, switched his view away to the space battle in front.

The Infinite Dawn lined up with the geth dreadnought and fired a full salvo from its two main CR-08 Series 8 Super-Heavy Magnetic Accelerator Cannons drilling through the geth dreadnought's barriers perfectly and leaving two gaping holes in the hull itself. The dreadnought proceeded to explode, damaging every ship nearby. The explosion was triggered from critical damage to the reactor since one MAC slug damaged it heavily while the other almost divided the ship in half.

'We've got a long day ahead of us, people. Let's do what we can here. Squadron one, protect the quarian right flank. Squadron two, protect the left flank. Destroyers rally up around the Infinite Dawn and pick off anyone who tries to attack directly.' The Captain stood up from his chair and grabbed a cup of coffee a fellow officer gave him, and he made his way forward, towards the window in front. He stood there and observed the geth fleet in front of him.

'Shepard better get here soon. I know he's on his way, and he better drag his ship and diplomatic skills over here now. If he won't get here, one of these fleets will be destroyed.'

><em>

\* \* \*

><p><strong>And that's the end of this chapter. Hope you enjoyed and... yeah. To all the Mass Effect fanboys monitoring me: 'Don't even bother commenting. Nobody likes you and your comments are bias.' But thank you anyway for giving me views! The next chapters should be here soon and I might be finished with this story by June or May!<strong>

End  
file.